

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



139 231

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

















BOOKS

*Written and Illustrated by*

ADDISON BURBANK

GUATEMALA PROFILE

THE CEDAR DEER

MEXICAN FRIEZE

# MEXICAN FRIEZE



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY  
**ADDISON BURBANK**

New York • COWARD-McCANN, Inc., 1940

COPYRIGHT, 1940, BY ADDISON BURBANK

*All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must  
not be reproduced in any form without permission.*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*Van Rees Press, New York*

TO

MY DEAR MOTHER





# CONTENTS

## Part One

### UNDER THE BIG SOMBRERO

I	LOOKING-GLASS LAND	3
II	TAXI TO TANCANHUITZ	8
III	CAPRICES	19
IV	FRIDA KAHLO AND DIEGO RIVERA	24
V	BEJEWELED MICHOACÁN	29
VI	NOBLE EXPERIMENT	34
VII	GUADALAJARA	40
VIII	THE TZINTZUNTZAN TITIAN	46

## Part Two

### LIFE WITH THE INDIANS

IX	SOUTH TO OAXACA	55
X	MYSTERIES OF MONTE ALBAN	62
XI	I GO TO HELL	70
XII	MARKET IN OAXACA	74
XIII	CURIOUS CUILAPAM	80
XIV	GOLD	84
XV	ITINERARY FOR A WILD GOOSE CHASE	96
XVI	LIFE WITH THE INDIANS	106
XVII	YALALAG	117
XVIII	WAKING THE DEAD	124



# CONTENTS

## Part One

### UNDER THE BIG SOMBRERO

I	LOOKING-GLASS LAND	3
II	TAXI TO TANCANHUITZ	8
III	CAPRICES	19
IV	FRIDA KAHLO AND DIEGO RIVERA	24
V	BEJEWELLED MICHOACÁN	29
VI	NOBLE EXPERIMENT	34
VII	GUADALAJARA	40
VIII	THE TZINTZUNTZAN TITIAN	46

## Part Two

### LIFE WITH THE INDIANS

IX	SOUTH TO OAXACA	55
X	MYSTERIES OF MONTE ALBAN	62
XI	I GO TO HELL	70
XII	MARKET IN OAXACA	74
XIII	CURIOUS CUILAPAM	80
XIV	GOLD	84
XV	ITINERARY FOR A WILD GOOSE CHASE	96
XVI	LIFE WITH THE INDIANS	106
XVII	YALALAG	117
XVIII	WAKING THE DEAD	124

# viii CONTENTS

XIX	SUNSHINE AND SONG	132
XX	AFOOT TO TEHUANTEPEC	138
XXI	MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE	145
XXII	BEAUTIFUL BATHERS	151
XXIII	MERRYMAKING WITH THE DEAD	160
XXIV	THE SANDUNGA	165

## Part Three

### YESTERDAY IN THE LAND OF TOMORROW

XXV	TRIP TO TUXTLA	175
XXVI	LEGEND OF THE SUMIDERO	179
XXVII	BELLS AND BOATS	186
XXVIII	YESTERDAY IN THE LAND OF TOMORROW	191
XXIX	THE CHAMULAS	199
XXX	TWILIGHT IN LARRAINZAR	203
XXXI	THE RAINBOW	207
XXXII	THE FIRST GREAT AMERICAN	214
XXXIII	INDIAN AFFAIRS	229
XXXIV	UNDER AND OVER THE CLOUDS	234
XXXV	HIDDEN CONVENT	240
XXXVI	XOCHIMILCO	249
XXXVII	ADIOS, MEXICO!	253
	GLOSSARY	257
	INDEX	265

Part One  
UNDER THE BIG  
SOMBRERO



7





## I: LOOKING-GLASS LAND

I WENT to Mexico as a painter thirsting for color—color in life. I wanted, above all, to see if the true Indians of Mexico, like those of Guatemala, still clung to their picturesque ancient dress and folkways. Nothing in this swiftly changing world is more astonishing and admirable than the steadfastness of those race-proud American Indians who, living amidst the ruins of their once-glorious civilization, stanchly isolate themselves from ours. The great Aztec empire fell before the Spanish blitzkrieg. But after four hundred years millions of Indians, wisely casting up the gains and losses of yielding to the white man's system, prefer the bitter but free life of their mountain refuges to bowing to the idol of Industry which they fear more than their own most awful god and which they know would as surely devour their living hearts. We, who are anxiously watching our ramparts against the threat to our own right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, are beginning to look upon the heroic example of the Indians with a new respect and conscience.

In my quest for local color I was often forced to disregard comfort and safety in order to visit some remote Indian village which seemed far enough from the world to have retained its



pre-Conquest pageantry; but, never fully satisfied with what I found, I pushed on and on until my travels took me at last from border to border. In consequence, this log of my experiences gives, I think, a fairly well-rounded picture of Mexico today.

Mexico is truly an enchanted land. From the moment I crossed the line at Laredo I felt myself in a world as strange and disconcerting as that which Alice found on the other side of the looking glass. If I had not been driven by a desire to find colorful native life, I would surely have succumbed to the charms of Michoacán or Oaxaca and gone no further. But then I would not have discovered—No! I will not anticipate.

I began my quest by car, but the good roads which make so much of northern Mexico accessible, peter out below the capital. Although I picked up completed sections of the Inter-American Highway in the most unexpected places, my travels in the south were made by plane, train, horse, and on foot. On the roughest stages I was fortunate in having as companion an American youth brought up in Mexico, whom a pretty Indian girl in Yalalag nick-named "Vicho" (Zapotec for Clear-eyed). Fearless, self-reliant, light-hearted, Vicho is the real hero of this narrative. The deeper we went into dangerous country the more he seemed to enjoy himself; the grimmer the situation, the gayer he became. I like to think of him riding ahead, his whippetlike body slouched in the saddle and one lanky leg thrown over the saddle horn, singing at the top of his lungs; taming a vicious mule which its owners were afraid to handle; making friends with Mexican cutthroats by teaching them to play three-in-a-line with kernels of corn. His strength and high spirits never flagged and buoyed mine when we were forced to go on beyond the plausible limits of human endurance.

The marvelous country through which Vicho and I traveled by slow and sometimes painful stages will soon be opened up by the magic carpet of the Inter-American Highway, and thousands of tourists will make in a few days what for us was a journey of weeks. The vanguard will be almost as strange an

apparition to the Indians of these forested recesses as were the first Spaniards to their forefathers four centuries ago. Civilization will have overtaken them at last.

I left New York with friends who were driving to Mexico. It was still early September, bright and clear in the north but, we were fully aware, still the rainy season in the tropical south. So, partly sparring for time, we took a devious route to the border, going by way of New Mexico where the adobe houses of Taos, the Indian life, and the sound of softly spoken Spanish gave us a foretaste of Old Mexico.

In San Antonio we read "*Hombres*" and "*Mujeres*" on the comfort station doors of the filling stations, and as we drove on toward the border we noticed that the traffic signs were bilingual, reminding us that we were in territory that once belonged to Mexico and still has a large Mexican population. When we turned on the car radio we picked up a broadcast of Mexican music. But in spite of these touches of foreignness we found Laredo as American as apple pie, and when we crossed the short, unimpressive span of the International Bridge over the gorge of the Rio Grande we felt ourselves thrust abruptly into a totally different world, already as Mexican as chili-hot tamales.

The bridge was more than ordinarily crowded that afternoon by Mexicans from Texas bent on painting Nuevo Laredo red in celebration of the Fifteenth of September, Mexico's Independence Day, when the nation remembers its heroic fighting priest, Father Guadalupe Hidalgo, who in 1810 incited and led the revolt from Spain with the cry "*Mueron los Gapuchines!*" (Death to the Spaniards!) The lid would be off in every town in Mexico after dark, and the press of traffic was almost more than the narrow bridge and the leisure-loving Mexican customs officials could take. The large woman with the little mustache and the busy customs stamp was in no genial mood. She passed all our luggage quickly and then with diabolic perversity held out two pieces of photographic equipment belonging to my

companions. We would probably have spent the rest of the day in argument if we had not had a letter from the Mexican Consul-General in New York.

But this minor incident was not enough to ruffle our tempers. We had stepped through the looking glass into a land where everything was going to be different. We dreamed of fantastic mountains, unheard-of forests, strange foods, and exotically beautiful women. Even our own personalities seemed metamorphosed, less prosaic, so that to fit them we gave each other Hispanicized nicknames—Doña Magdalena, Doña Maruca, Don Pablo, and Don Adisón.

A pathetically thin waif of a Mexican boy with a face as melting as a Raphael cherub offered gardenias for sale.

"*Gardenias, señor! Cinco centavos cada una,*" he said in soft Spanish, smiling wistfully.

A penny a piece for gardenias! I bought a spray for Doña Magdalena and Doña Maruca, chalking up, I could not help thinking, a new low for gallantry.

"Pesos—5.10 for a dollar." Although the price was the same in every tiny money changer's booth which lined the narrow street, the money changers pressed us so insistently to buy that we suspected we would be able to do better in the interior, and waited. But we were never offered such a favorable exchange again.

A home-coming tourist couple was going through the American customs when we went there to register Don Pablo's cameras. They were wearing rakish sombreros, loud shirts, hand-woven belts, and *huaraches*, and their travel trophies—gay Spanish tiles, odd pieces of pottery, amusing in form and delicious in hue, hand-tooled leather goods, bright-figured textiles, and handsome wool serapes—lay spilled out of gaudy straw hampers. I foresaw that I would have to stiffen my sales resistance if my money was going to hold out in Mexico.

When finally our luggage had been passed and stowed in place we got back in the car where the heat of the border had become

pocketed, solid, stultifying. But movement gave some relief. And soon we were whizzing over the broad highway across the cactus-covered desert.

After midnight we turned in at a tidy auto camp on the outskirts of Monterrey, where for fifteen pesos (\$3.00) we had a two-room bungalow, very new and clean, with all conveniences. But we were not to enjoy many hours of sleep, for at sunrise we were awakened by the firing of guns, blowing of whistles, and the passing of soldiers and military bands in the road.

In Monterrey we learned that the holiday began on the fourteenth and lasted through the sixteenth. The town lay basking in the sun at the foot of Saddle Mountain. All business was at a standstill, and we could find only one hotel that was serving meals. When we came from breakfast, however, the streets were animated by a parade of soldiers, boys on bicycles, and serious-faced students of both sexes. Three planes zoomed again and again over the town trying to look like a whole air fleet.

The exact moment when we crossed into the Tropic of Cancer was marked by a stone tablet, but the most convincing proof was the change from barren desert to lush jungle. We were now in the mountains, curving at times down into deep damp glades; at others swinging up over the brow of round hills from which we gained vistas of green plains where isolated peaks rose like volcanic islands from the sea. One peak resembling the crown of a Mexican straw hat was called El Sombrero.

We saw orchids and scarlet air plants feathering the limbs of the trees. Toward evening, flocks of noisy green parrots broke the hush of the forest on their homeward flight. A light rain was falling when, in the gathering dusk, we reached Valles.



## II: TAXI TO TANCANHUITZ

AT the hotel in Valles where we stopped for the night we learned of the near-by Huastecan Indian village of Tancanhuitz where the women still wear traditional costumes.

"I wouldn't advise you to go in your heavy car," the manager warned. "The road is in frightful condition from the rains."

Thinking that the mayor of Valles might be helpful, we drove into the village. In spite of a thin drizzle the little plaza was filled with people for the final night of fiesta. A band was playing on the steps of the municipal palace and the people were walking around the plaza, the women and girls taking one direction while the men and boys took the opposite. As they passed they laughed, flirted, and showered each other with confetti. Onlookers formed a hollow square before the musicians and, looking over their heads, we saw couples dancing with pre-jitterbug sedateness. The somewhat elderly mayor was dancing with the queen of the fiesta, a slender girl in a filmy evening dress, so much taller than himself that she looked down on his bald crown. Her face wore a little grimace of disgust.

The mayor placed himself at our disposal, but not until such a late hour the next day that it amounted to a polite refusal.

But in Valles we found a taxi. Perhaps if it had been less dark we would not have hired it. But in some confused way we ended up by engaging the driver to take us, not only to Tancanhuitz, but to Xilitla, which the hotel manager had told us was "just across the road."

In the morning when we saw the car we gasped. Although comparatively new, it was already a mud-covered wreck with dented and frayed fenders. The door of the back compartment hung by one broken hinge. Before starting the driver asked for money to buy gas at a Pe-Mex filling station, expropriated property of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.

As the morning was chilly, the windows were up. But before we had gone a mile smoke, black and acrid, began pouring up through the floor, causing us to cough and gag.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Doña Magdalena. "The car is on fire."

But the driver with great coolness explained that it was only smoke from the broken exhaust pipe. There was nothing to be done about it except to put the windows down and our coat collars up.

Cattle covered the road in various stationary attitudes, and every now and then we would be thrown from our seats as the driver slammed on brakes to avoid hitting them. Buses were less considerate, as the corpse of a burro proved. Horses were worse than the phlegmatic cows, for when startled they were as apt to run in front of the car as to get out of the way.

The driver tooted his horn by short-circuiting a loose wire against the dash. He had a horseshoe looped around the steering post and a medal of St. Christopher, patron saint of travelers, over the windshield. It was not enough.

Now and again we passed groups of Huasteca Indians trotting to the *tianguis* or street fair. I stared after the women in delight. They were like Dresden China dolls. They wore a pointed white bertha or *quexquemetil*, richly embroidered,

which fell below the waist. Their skirts were either white or navy, and were gathered in folds in front. They bound their hair with a strand of varicolored worsted, called a *petop*, the variations of color disclosing the age and social status of the wearer. A small kerchief, or *putch*, either plain or fancy, covered the back of the head. Every woman wore gold or silver ear bobs, often made of small coins, and more or less elaborate necklaces, some of which were tied in back with showy ribbons which were a further indication of social status. Virgins or recently married women wear very long ribbons, but with the passing of time they shorten them by half and after the birth of their first child give them up altogether. While their men wear sandals or *cacles*, as the Huastecas call them, the women prefer to go barefoot, only covering their feet in cases of sickness.

We turned off the highway onto a dirt road and soon came to a rushing river, which we crossed on a cable ferry—an ingenious device for using the force of the current itself as motive power. There are few such ferries left, even in Mexico.

So sharp was the incline of the opposite bank that our car hardly made the grade on the low quality Mexican gas. Up, up we labored, mostly in second or low gear, the radiator steaming and spluttering. A rain of steam stung our faces, our eyes.

A young Mexican jumped on the running board—a custom of the road. His added weight was the straw that broke the camel's back. The motor gave up the struggle. Even the brakes went on strike. The car rolled backwards, gaining momentum every second. Sharp curves and steep precipices yawned behind us.

Our running-board passenger earned his fare. With catlike quickness he leaped off, found a loose boulder, and shoved it in the path of the wheels. A bump and we were safe.

While waiting for the motor to cool (our ingenious driver spat on it!) we had a chance to admire the gorgeous tropical vista—the giant trees, bristling with parasitic plants, which rose

from the flowery undergrowth. Their limbs were hung with lianas on which bright-hued birds swung playfully, and coiled about their tall trunks were thick-stemmed creepers with enormous shiny green leaves like many-fingered satin gloves.

Doña Magdalena: "Look at the lovely angel-wing begonias, maidenhair fern, and philadendrons!"

Doña Maruca: "And Scarlett O'Hara morning glories!"

Sure enough, the undergrowth was overladen with America's newest flower sensation.

It was a world of pure magic. The sunlight fell upon it with crushing splendor, as it does only in the tropics. The air was warm yet crisp and filled with the delicious scents of a thousand blooms—wild gardenias, spider lilies, flaming double hibiscus, roses of Castile. . . . Limes and guavas and platanos shaded a tangle of lustrous-leaved coffee bushes, growing seemingly without cultivation. But we were wrong about that.

An Indian in white cotton shirt and *calzones* appeared on the embankment above us. When we climbed up to talk to him we saw his house in a little clearing. A dozen little children ran into the house at our approach. Beady eyes set in brown ovals watched us from the dark doorway. We were sure the *carrizo*-stalk walls had eyes as well as ears.

The house was built on different levels. Its walls were plastered with mud to a height of about three feet. It had a conical roof of palm thatch. In the shelter of a sort of open front porch was piled a month's supply of firewood. Wooden ox yokes and wooden plows made of a single trunk of a sapling cut off at the crotch, with a point hardened by fire, lay about on the stamped earth floor. Dried corn and huge lumps of brown beeswax for making candles hung from the rafters. It was Mexico before the Spaniards introduced iron.

The Indian said his name was Andrés Guzman. With his permission we went into the house, climbing over the high doorstep by means of a little ladder and stooping to avoid bumping our heads on the low lintel.



The scene within took our breath. About twenty-five women and children squatted upon the floor amidst pigs, chickens, and dogs. The room was in the shape of a big L. In the ell was an elaborate altar with the patron saint. There was an offering of lighted candles and fresh-cut flowers before the painted image. Gourds, machetes, earthen jars, rolled-up sleeping mats, and other articles of daily use hung about the walls.

We asked: "Is this all your family?"

Andrés admitted he had four wives and that most of the children were his own. His married sons lived with him too, all in this one great room.

"You are *muy hombre*—some man!" I said.

Andrés grinned good-naturedly.

Through the slits in the cane wall that partitioned off the kitchen we could see the shadowy forms of several women bobbing up and down over their corn-grinding stones at the unremitting task of providing *tortillas*, the Indian's staff of life, for the huge family.

In the back yard two immense hogs were lying in a mud wallow. A primitive apiary of hollowed logs set on posts was shaded by a leaf-covered lattice and the air was filled with the golden dust of pollen-laden bees which made a continuous murmur.

Andrés and his sons willingly posed for snapshots of themselves, but the women wouldn't join the family group.

"*Tienen verguenza*—they are ashamed," said one of the boys.

We returned to the car and waved good-by to Andrés and his sons who stood watching us from the embankment. But the motor refused to start.

In disgust, Doña Maruca and I got out and started to walk. The last we saw of the car it was rolling jerkily down hill while the driver attempted to start it by gravity.

Before long we met an Indian and asked the distance to Xilitla. He glanced up at the sun and said that we would be

there in two hours. It was then about ten o'clock—three hours since we had started.

At long intervals we passed lonely thatched huts. Again, on distant hill slopes, we would see a huddle of conical roofs above the tree tops, a smudge of brown smoke hanging over them in the still air. Huge butterflies with blue enamel wings danced before us, little snakes like strands of bright beads slithered across the road, and once a procession of leaf-cutting ants, each carrying a green banner several times its own size, crossed our path.

Shortly after we saw Xilitla hanging to a mountain slope across a great *barranca*, we heard the machine-gun fire of a broken exhaust and were overtaken by our companions in the taxi. We got in. But just below the town the car broke down again, and this time—in spite of St. Christopher and the horse-shoe—it was a total collapse.

We climbed a long steep street of steps, like a Toltec pyramid, to the plaza, passing on the way loose burros and sows lying in the shade of the white plaster walls contentedly suckling their litters. There was a crowded *tianguis*, or street mart, and the sun was shining through the white canvas tops of the little portable sun shades upon colorful heaps of produce and merchandise spread upon the stone flagging.

Xilitla is a modern coffee town, and the Indians who come to the market are Otomies, the oldest but most degraded race in Mexico. The average Otomi manages to keep body and soul—but little else—together on seven centavos, or a penny and a half, a day. Yet they are an industrious people and make some of the most beautiful embroidery and basketry in the country, their poverty resulting from their shameful exploitation by the middlemen who reap rich profits from their work.

At the time of the Conquest, the Otomies, like the Philistines, sent forth a champion to challenge a conquistador to a fist fight, the outcome of which would decide the question of racial su-

premacy. The Otomi champion lost, and the tribe abided by the decision.

I went to ask permission to sketch and take photographs of the *presidente municipal*, who listened patiently to my torrent of imperfect Spanish and then said in English:

"So you are an American!"

He said we were free to do anything we pleased short of rape and murder, which was as much as we could have asked in the absence of any inducement to attempt either.

In the plaza we met an American, the only foreign resident, a hardy-looking man upwards of fifty with grizzled hair, bad teeth, and haunted blue eyes. He had drifted down from California in the days when fortunes were being made and lost in Mexican mining and oil ventures. He came to Xilitla to engage in silver mining, but like so many other foreigners had been forced out of business by the new labor laws. Now he was eking out a bare living as a mason. He had laid most of the sidewalks in the town.

"I am married to a native woman and have seven or eight children, most of them not my own, to look after," he said. "A few pesos a day are all we need. If a man makes money they take it away from him. But Mexico is a happy land for poor people. A man can have a home, a few pigs and chickens, and a patch of corn—native style, but good. I don't care to leave. I wouldn't fit in, up home."

He took us to see the one ancient building in Xilitla—the four-hundred-year-old Augustinian monastery. The stout masonry walls were still standing in defiance of time and earthquakes, but the interior was in ruins and filled with debris. Just inside the entrance we saw a *torito*—a papier mâché head and torso of a bull made over a framework of bamboo and covered with exploded pin wheels and roman candles—which had been used in the fiesta the night before. On climbing the broad stairway to the second story we were met by a frightful stench. The cells of the monks had been turned into prison cells and were

only too obviously without sanitary provision. We hurried on up to the old bell tower, where we could breathe again. The tower was crumbling and the big bells were cracked. This monastery had been built to civilize the Indians, but the scene we looked down upon was scarcely changed after four hundred years. The Indians were still talking in their own idiom by preference and living in isolated huts in the hills exactly as they did before the Spaniards came.

Hearing the strains of stringed music and the explosion of rockets, we went out into the town and met a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery. The deceased was a boy of fourteen who, we learned from his sobbing mother, had been killed by a fall from a horse. The coffin, borne on the shoulders of three men, was open and we could see the dead boy, dressed as a saint (it is customary in a Mexican funeral to dress boys as saints and girls as brides). He had a gilt crown on his head and a sheaf of lilies on his chest beneath his folded hands.

The procession was headed by a boy carrying a box of cut flowers to place on the grave. Another boy carried an armful of small rockets which he shot off every minute or two, lighting the fuse with a firebrand. They were followed by a violinist and a guitarist, the straggling file of mourners, the pall bearers, and a man carrying the coffin lid on his head.

They allowed us to take photographs, and the bereaved mother accepted money for *aguardiente* to drown her sorrow.

We found a car in the town, hardly less of a wreck than the one we had come in, and engaged it to take us back to Valles. The driver had an aide—a cocky youngster who squeezed into the front seat with me—and on our way we picked up our first driver, who sat on one of the front fenders. As we proceeded we picked up more free passengers—mostly small boys—as a cow collects ticks, until the car fairly swarmed with them.

Back at the juncture of the Inter-American Highway, we dropped our extra passengers. It was still light, and although a storm threatened, we took a chance on going to Tancanhuitz—

our original goal—which was only three miles off the highway.

Three miles, but such miles! Our little aide got out and piloted us over the rocks and ruts, darting fore and aft, checking every excessive bump that might mean a scraped-off battery, a broken spring or a punctured gas tank. But we arrived intact, except for our nerves which were frayed to the snapping point.

I, for one, felt that it was worth it. As I started up the winding street to the church on the top of the hill I saw a group of women going to chapel. They looked chastely nunlike in their white *quexquemets*. I arrived slightly winded, but the beauty of the old church painted in subtle relief against the thunderous storm sky further took my breath. Over the years the church had been tinted sometimes pink and sometimes blue, but now for a long time it had undergone no chameleonlike changes of hue, and wind and rain and sun had been at work scraping and fading and blending all the old underpainting until the effect was like a Degas pastel.

I took a different street from the plaza which led down through the town like a broad winding stairway with shallow shelving steps, paved in a mosaic of small stones. Little square houses with windowless walls as white as milk were set here and there in gardens of papayas, mangoes, and hibiscus.

Glancing over flowery hedges, I caught glimpses of the quietly industrious people at work—the men at their looms weaving their indispensable carrying bags of *ixtle* fiber; the women embroidering their gay *quexquemets*. Some men were making the doll-like furniture of the Indians; others were turning the gracefully simple pottery; one was pounding the leaves of the *lechuguilla* cactus into *ixtle* fiber. The sound of his wooden mallet was like the muffled beating of a tom-tom. All the people seemed occupied with some form of home industry—one of the cornerstones of Indian self-sufficiency from time out of mind.

At the foot of the street I crossed an arched stone bridge over a gurgling brook and entered the *zócalo*, or main plaza. The *tianguis*, which had been held under the spreading *amate* trees,

had broken up, and there were only a few stragglers left. I saw a pretty girl, not over thirteen, but already a mother with a child astride her hip. We would have called her a child herself, but the Indians of the hot tropics consider twelve a marriagable age for a girl and sixteen for a boy. Marriages are often arranged between neighbors before the children are able to walk.

The usual marriage, however, follows a lengthy formal ritual. When the children are old enough to marry, the father of the boy goes to the house of the girl's parents between eight and nine at night and, after a polite interchange of set speeches, presents the boy's compliments with a gift of *aguardiente* and a corn tamale containing a whole turkey. He does not, however, make any mention of the real purpose of his visit. This first offer is always rejected, but is repeated three or four months later when the girl's father, while still refusing the gifts, sets a time five or six months in the future for giving a definite decision. He declares that his daughter is not ready for the responsibilities of married life. But from that day the mother begins preparing her for her conjugal duties.

The church marriage generally takes place on Sunday. On the eve of the ceremony a curious rite called the "taking of the bride" is held in her home. This consists of a simple dinner to which friends of both families are invited and at which notice is given that the civil ceremony has been performed. But not until fifteen days after the church service is the bride actually given to her husband.

On that day all the relatives and friends march in a body to the house of the groom where great preparations have been made to receive them. The bride is now given in marriage as Indian brides were given before the Spanish civil and religious services were known. The bride for the first time makes her vow to her husband. There is music, dancing, and drinking. Besides the indispensable tamale with the whole turkey, a bull calf is killed and the celebration lasts for three days with increasing gaiety.

The newlyweds live with the groom's parents until the family

increases to the point where there is no longer house room for them. Early marriage is one reason for the absence of prostitution among the Huastecas.

A faint drizzle had started to fall when we left Tancanhuitz, but luckily for us the rain did not come down in force until after we had regained the highway, and we returned to our hotel without further mishap.



### III: CAPRICES

RAIN was falling when we left Valles next morning on the last lap of our trip to the capital. But the almost continual rains of this region make possible three harvests of corn a year. The Huastecas may well consider the rain god their most important deity, for it gives them a wealth of luscious fruits and vegetables with almost no expenditure of effort on their part. Abundant rainfall explains the vast difference in the standard of living between the Huastecas and the Otomies of the desert regions further south.

Our speed was hindered, as usual, by the cattle on the highway which stolidly disregarded our screaming siren until we were on the point of ramming them to perdition. It seems odd that the Indians are so careless of their cattle, which represent their sole form of investment. Lacking banks, what surplus capital an Indian is able to accumulate must either be buried or put into livestock—the Indian's substitute for an interest-bearing account.

Once we nearly ran over a creature that looked at first glance like a small land turtle. But, stopping the car and returning to



investigate, we found that it was a huge and very gaudy tarantula. Don Pablo wanted to take some color shots of it, but by the time he got out his equipment it had crawled to the roadside and was fast disappearing among the weeds. Doña Maruca got a long stick and poked it out onto the road again where the venomous insect posed quietly for its portrait.

By a gradual transition we passed from the mountainous land of rain to the dry prickly desert, a stony desolation of thorny scrub and cacti sticking up like pins. For some curious reason—could it be graft?—the road, instead of following a straight line, crosses this flat and dreary expanse by tortuous curves that sometimes nearly meet in circles. The Mexicans call these roundabout excursions “caprices.”

As we neared Mexico City late in the afternoon we met countless Otomi Indians walking in the road. Nearly all of them were spinning *ixtle* fiber as they went. We became fascinated watching them. They carried the raw fiber in a big wad on the left shoulder and threw their twirling spindle in front of them, catching it just at the right moment. It was as good as any sleight-of-hand performance seen on the stage.

We stopped to take pictures and were instantly surrounded by women begging for a “*quinto para mi pulque*” (five centavos to buy *pulque*—the cactus beer of Mexico). I have remarked on the poverty of the Otomies. These were living on the edge of destitution. The blouses of the women were often too ragged to cover their breasts. We did not have enough quintos to distribute among them, but Doña Magdalena opened two big jars of hard candies and handed them out until all were gone.

It was dismaying to find these diligent and gentle-spirited Indians living literally on the ragged edge of existence under a government dedicated to giving them a new deal. I had hoped to find it otherwise.

From the beginning of Spanish domination the Indians, for lack of a united front, have been mercilessly exploited. The Spaniards intended that the Indians should form the perpetual

base of the social pyramid they erected for their own exaltation. They even called their own sons born in America "creoles" and excluded them from equal social and political rights with themselves. Their caste system contained a score of distinctions. And as this effort to prevent, rather than to bring about, social amalgamation is the direct cause of Mexico's failure to become a real nation, I cannot resist giving the colonial caste system in full:

#### CROSS BETWEEN SPANIARD AND INDIAN

Spaniard and Indian: *mestizo*

Mestizo and Spaniard: *castizo*

*Castizo* and Spanish woman: *españololo*

#### CROSS BETWEEN SPANIARD AND NEGRO

Spaniard and Negro: *mulatto*

Mulatto and Spaniard: *Moor*

Spaniard and Moorish woman: *albino*

Spaniard and albino woman: *salta atras* (throw back)

#### CROSS BETWEEN INDIAN AND NEGRO

*Salta atras* and Indian woman: *lobo* (wolf)

*Lobo* and Indian woman: *zambiago*

*Zambiago* and Indian woman: *cambujo*

*Cambujo* and mulatto woman: *alvarazado*

*Alvarazado* and mulatto woman: *barquino*

*Barquino* and mulatto woman: *coyote*

*Coyote* and mulatto woman: *chamizo*

*Chamizo* and mestizo woman: *coyote-mestizo*

*Coyote-mestizo* and mulatto woman: *abi-te-estás* (there-thou-art)

The Indians have only one word for all mixed bloods—*ladino*. I was told on good authority that to them the word signifies fox.

Since Independence the Indian, who should have been the

chief beneficiary, has been subjected to ever more ruthless exploitation. As I looked through the car window at the ragged and starved remnant of the oldest race on the continent, it seemed to me that this was the pay-off. With barely enough to cover or fill them, they were surviving through sheer hardiness—a hardiness that can maintain life for weeks solely on a small daily ration of parched corn and salt.

Driving on, we came shortly within sight of the Mexican capital, dominated by the towers of the cathedral which rise upon the very site of the temple pyramid of the ancient Indian capital, which four hundred years ago, when Cortez and his followers first beheld it, was a majestic city of astonishing size and beauty built in the middle of Lake Texcoco and approached by three long causeways. Like Venice, its thoroughfares were canals bordered by palaces built of stone, terraced in the unique style of ancient America, and surfaced with white plaster that glistened in the sun. Now there is no encircling lake, for the Spaniards continued the work of drainage already begun by the Aztec engineers and have left only the portion of water-traversed gardens at Xochimilco.

As we entered Mexico City we passed an information booth at the beginning of a beautiful new palm-lined boulevard that passes through a recent residential development of houses in the modern style, strangely reminiscent of the homes of pre-Cortesian Mexico. Just before crossing the railroad into the older part of the city where we were forced to slow down, we were beset by busboys from various hotels who jumped upon the running board and deluged us with literature.

We were impressed at once by the foreignness of the city, but it is a foreignness that recalls sometimes Spain and sometimes Paris. In the great *zócalo* with its dun-colored cathedral and its pink-and-white corridorred municipal palaces we felt the spirit of Old Spain; but the influence of Paris brooded over the narrow streets of the business section and the broad Paseo de la Reforma with its Fine Arts Palace, modeled on the Opéra, its

monuments and shady parks. The capital is distinctly a cosmopolitan city and a little ashamed of the purely Mexican touches—the occasional costumed natives and the vendors of Indian crafts who, with the rising tide of tourists, are threatening to turn even the Avenida Francisco I. Madero, the capital's main street, into a native street fair.

As we had arrived too late to get our mail at Wells Fargo's, we went directly to the Montejo, a quiet hotel on the Paseo whose name honors the memory of the conqueror of Yucatan, where we made our headquarters during the few days we were to spend in Mexico City.



## IV: FRIDA KAHLO AND DIEGO RIVERA

WE spent half a day trying to telephone Diego Rivera. The existence of two rival telephone companies—Mexican and Ericson—was confusing enough; but Diego was not listed in either directory, and neither central would give us his private number. There was nothing for it but to make an unheralded call at his studio in the suburb of Coyoacán.

Doubtless his fame makes it necessary for him to intrench himself against intrusion. The bristling organ-cactus fence around his fortresslike modern studio is like a warning to strangers.

As we passed inside the cactus fence I looked for clues to the enigma of Diego's strange character. The personal things with which we surround ourselves are usually the truest revelation of our personality. A dachshund, a parrot, and a monkey—what sort of man would choose such pets? A yard filled with ancient stone idols instead of flowers; a big canvas of a reclining nude painted in muddy colors and placed in the open passageway between the garage and the studio; an outside stairway as

unbeautiful as a fire escape leading to the studio on the second floor—what do such eccentricities mean?

Diego met us at the door. There was a trace of annoyance and helplessness mingled with natural warmth in the smile on his round, neckless face. His thinning crinkly hair stood on end, as if he had the habit of running his hand through it. A green eyeshade covered his big bulging eyes—those myopic mirrors of Mexican life—which were threatening to fail him in his prime and were being treated by a famous specialist. Sickness had deflated his former jolly bulk.

His studio was cheerless, harsh, unfinished-looking, with a bare tile ceiling. It was filled with Aztec and Mayan statuary and cases of Indian relics—carved jade, clay flutes, pottery figurines, precious fragments of ancient Indian art. Standing about in the corners of the room were huge comic figures of papier mâché covered with a network of fuses and fireworks, such as are used in Mexican fiestas. The effect was of a disorderly store-room in which the artist had cleared a small space to work.

We had interrupted him in the midst of painting a small easel portrait of a tiny Indian girl wearing a blue dress and a huge pink ribbon in her hair. The miniature model was seated on a miniature chair, while her mother sat near by patiently unraveling the fringe of a new silk *reboso*.

"So you are related to Luther Burbank," Diego said as we seated ourselves. "We think a great deal of him here in Mexico. He created things to eat to keep people alive—that is next to God. Frida has a painting of him in the San Francisco Fair. They worship him in Russia. When I went there they took me for an American. They said, 'Welcome to the land of Burbank.'"

Diego speaks a fluent, though broken, English. When Don Pablo told him of a young American who wanted to study under him, he said:

"I never teach art. I think to do so is dishonest. Art can't be taught. If your young friend is an artist, he doesn't need me. If he isn't, I can't make him one. Of course, if he wants to

learn the technique of fresco painting, let him come down and watch me work. That is as far as I go. I don't tell anyone what art is because I am not sure what it is myself."

Turning to me he said:

"I know your *Guatemala Profile*.<sup>\*</sup> You write as if you envied the Indians, but I don't think you'd like to be one."

I answered that, while I could not become an Indian, I admired their way of life and would like to see them adhere to it. At the same time, I wanted them to progress.

We were soon involved in a hot debate which reached the sizzling point when I said I didn't agree with the government's program of closing the churches and substituting schools.

"If you don't believe in schools for the Indians, we can't talk to each other," said Diego.

But when I clarified my position by saying that I thought the Indians should first be given a chance to help themselves economically so that they could afford to give their children an education, we came to an amicable agreement.

I then asked: "Is there any Indian life in Mexico as colorful and unspoiled as that in Guatemala?"

"Yes," he nodded. "But just as the Guatemalan tribes are localized, so are those of Mexico. But, Mexico being a much larger country, less is known of them."

He took my notebook and wrote in it the names of the Indian villages he considered my best bets—Pátzcuaro, Janitzio, Paracho, and Tzintzuntzan in the state of Michoacán, and Yalalag and Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca. He heavily underscored Yalalag and Tehuantepec.

"Yalalag is *precioso*," he said enthusiastically. "You must surely go there. You have to get horses in Oaxaca. It's a four- or five-day trip.

"But you don't have to go out of Mexico City," he added, "to find Indians who have never learned Spanish and who still

<sup>\*</sup> Coward-McCann, New York. \$3.50.

practice their ancient tribal rites. When you come back, I'll go around with you, if you like."

While I was unable to take advantage of his kindly offer, I did visit all of the villages recommended, as I shall tell in the course of this narrative.

The next day we had dinner (usually a midday meal in Mexico) with Frida and Diego at the former's home. Although they were getting a divorce, their relations were still friendly.

Frida's house was as old-fashioned as Diego's was modern. It had the austere exterior and charming interior characteristic of Spanish colonial architecture. In the corridor of the main patio with its flower scents and purple shade, we were met by the breath-taking Frida and her pet fawn, Graniza.

No! breath-taking is understatement. Neither will beautiful, charming, vivacious do. Such adjectives are too trite for Frida. Her attraction lies in her originality. Her morbid originality. She is called the Artist of Death.

But standing there with her little spotted fawn, symbol of tenderness, this lover of the macabre looked glowingly, youthfully alive. She was dressed in full Tehuana costume, with a yellow and purple *buipil* and full flounced skirt. Her black hair was tightly braided and wound around her head after the immemorial manner of the Indians, but in place of the usual ribbon she wore a diadem of purple bougainvillea blossoms. She was—oh, hell!—breath-taking.

We followed her into her creepy studio where Death makes continuous holiday. Dividing the room like a partition was a life-size double self-portrait of Frida. One Frida wears a Victorian dress and the other a Tehuana costume, but each wears her heart on her blouse. An exposed artery wraps itself around the left arm of the Tehuana Frida and leads to a miniature portrait of Diego as a child held in her lap. Another artery sails across the cloud-filled background to connect with the heart of Victorian Frida, while a branch artery spills blood over the flowered silk skirt but is stopped by surgical pincers. Both



Fridas wear their hair in a pompadour and appear to be identical twins.

On the walls were smaller paintings—a still life with macabre motifs; the portrait of a dead Indian boy laid out on a *petate*, or rush mat, with lilies in his hands and a gilt crown set on his head at a rakish angle; a painting of the birth of a still-born baby which left nothing to the imagination; the bust of a nude Indian woman nursing a diminutive Frida at her left breast which shows an exposed network of veins while the right breast drips unprofitable milk; a painting called “Mexico’s Four Inhabitants”—Death . . .

At this point in my rounds Frida put a stiff hooker of mescal in my hand. It sent a grateful tingle of life through my nearly congealed veins.

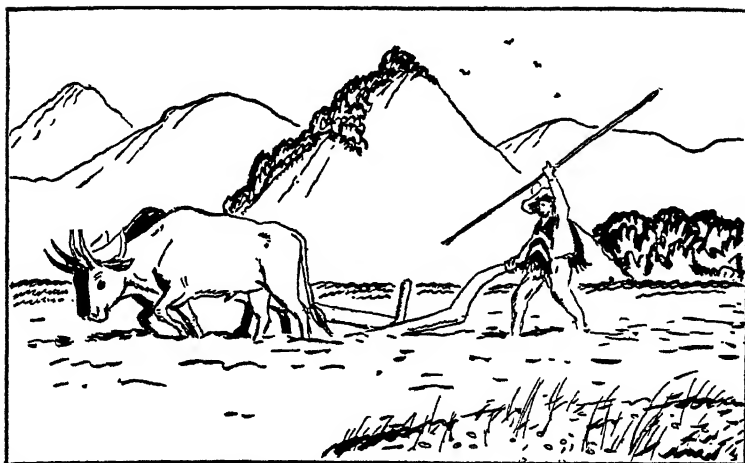
When I felt sufficiently fortified, I planted myself before the painting of the two Fridas determined, if possible, to unravel the plot. I concluded that the change of costume meant a change of personality; the joined hands, the necessity for self-reliance; the pincers closing the bleeding artery, the mechanical desire to go on living, and the artery lovingly encircling the child-portrait of Diego—could it express her constant tenderness for the Mexican master who is, in the opinion of those know him best, only a grown-up child?

But when I asked Frida what she had intended the painting to mean, she only laughed and said:

“I’m a nut!”

Diego came in looking very worn, and Frida went to him and made him sit down and unbutton his vest. He let her fuss over him as though he were a little boy. His big eyes looked up at her in such a way that the curious thought came to me that if he had been a dog he would have licked her hand. I turned away.

I was glad when we left the presence of the two frustrated Fridas and went to dinner.



## V: BEJEWELLED MICHUACÁN

The god of corn has been born  
In the place where there is water and rain,  
Where the sons of men are made,  
In bejeweled Michoacán.

*Aztec sacred hymn.*

**B**EFORE setting out for Michoacán I went to see Professor Luis Chávez Orozco, chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Young, energetic, and highly intelligent, he impressed me as sincerely sympathetic with the cause in which he is laboring. When I told him of the shocking condition of the Otomi Indians I had seen on the Inter-American Highway, he leaned forward and said earnestly:

"The Otomies of the state of Hidalgo live the bitterest and saddest life it is humanly possible to endure. They have lost confidence in everyone. They shy from the Spaniards and mestizos because both have leagued together to exploit them in the most iniquitous and cruel manner.

"The Otomies of the Mezquital valley avoid all people from the towns, not because they reject contact with civilization, but

because they wish to shun the wickedness and perfidy of townspeople. By constant effort, however, our department has finally persuaded these people to come down to the centers of population in the faith that the president will live up to his oft-repeated promises to aid them. And in this zone where hunger is the Indian's only patrimony, we have succeeded in establishing co-operatives to protect the Indian from exploitation, to enable him to buy the prime necessities at a low price and to dispose of his products at a profit that will enable him to enjoy utilities formerly denied him."

He outlined the program of the department as: (a) the establishment of schools in the Indian villages with a curriculum adapted to each race and region; (b) the introduction of new methods and machinery in the Indian's home industry and small farming, and (c) the organization of co-operatives of every sort directed by experts that will help the individual to increase his economic possibilities and realize benefits and projects which until today have been unrealizable. The principal center of experimentation, he said, was Paracho, and when I told him that I planned to go there, he gave me a letter to the director of the Vocational School of Agriculture.

"Our work is one of education," he explained, "not only the education of the Indian, but the education of the general public to the fact that the Indian problem is everyone's problem. Not until, in place of fifty tribes which do not know how to read and write<sup>a</sup> and lack all political responsibility, we have a united nation of literate citizens, can Mexico consider herself a true democracy."

Reform programs are tremendously exciting to anyone with humanitarian sympathies, and I was eager to see what sort of chickens were being hatched from these revolutionary eggs.

We left for "bejeweled Michoacán" on a Friday afternoon. A light rain was falling. We had seen little of the sun during our entire stay in the capital and the clouds had hung so low over the volcanoes of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl that we

had not been treated to a single glimpse of their icy summits.

At the Lerma River we saw, as we crossed the old Spanish bridge, punts poled by Indians and burdened with cargoes of reeds until there was hardly an inch of freeboard. The scene was so Oriental in effect that it seemed like a Japanese print come to life.

In Toluca we stopped to see the big market and bought some *morelanos*—delicious honey cakes which take their name from the city of Morelia of which they are a specialty.

The landscape grew truly magnificent as we got deeper into Michoacán. The hill slopes were bejeweled with countless red-violet cosmos, which the Spaniards call *mirasol* because it always faces the sun. Perhaps the cosmos was in bloom when the Aztec poet composed his sacred hymn.

We arrived late at night at the beautiful colonial city of Morelia, the capital of Michoacán, which was known as Valladolid until patriotic fervor changed its name in honor of the revolutionary hero Morelos.

At Uruápan, our next stop, we stayed at a hotel facing the church plaza. I was awakened by the bells tolling early mass. As I lay listening to the patter of myriad feet converging on the church I recalled that President Cárdenas had tried to close the churches but was forced to permit the re-opening of a certain proportion of them because he became tired of finding them filled anyway. He learned that you can't prohibit what people want.

I dressed and went out into the gray dawn-lit plaza where I found hundreds of Indians hurrying from every direction to the lighted church. By the time I reached it there was not a seat left and very little standing room. But still the people came until the church would hold no more and the latest comers stood in the walk outside the open doors. I found myself in a press of men wrapped to the eyes in serapes and women shrouded in *rebosos*. It was bitterly cold in the great draughty half-

ruined church, and all through the service the words of the priest were drowned by constant coughing.

Before mass was over I heard the market vendors' cries in the streets, and when I went out I saw thousands of Indians surging toward the central market. The curbs were already lined with *puestos* while others were rapidly going up and the vendors were setting out their wares in neat little piles. In the long cool *portales* of the buildings vendors of pottery, lacquer ware, carved swizzle sticks, and painted toys were arranging their offerings on wooden stands. This, I learned, was the most important market in Michoacán.

Little curb restaurants—often with no more than an oil-can brazier for a kitchen—were being set up and no sooner in operation than customers came with appetites made lusty by the early morning walk down from the hills. There were *tortillas* and bowls of black coffee for the poor, but for those with well-lined purses there were cups of foamy hot chocolate, sweetened rolls, glacéd sweet potatoes, and even hot cakes and honey. Fore-runners of Childs!

Color and sunlight began to brighten the drab streets like primary pigments squeezed direct from the tube. Piles of red-violet *camotes* (a sort of sweet potato), red and green chili peppers, *tunas* (fruit of the *nopal* cactus), loquats, onions, *chayotes* (native prickly squash), blue, yellow, and white corn, peanuts, bananas, oranges, and guavas—all were laid out in precise patterns on clean rush mats. The pungent turpentine odor of the guavas infiltrated the entire market, overwhelming the sweeter scents of the magnolias, jasmine, and tube roses which were offered in a profusion to be expected in a town whose name means "Where-flowers-are-blooming."

My first sight of a Tarascan Indian woman in her true regional dress caused my jaw to drop in amazement. Her skirt, made of thirty yards of cloth, was worn over another no less skimpy. This feat of fashion was achieved by gathering the cloth into innumerable pleats, mostly behind in an unbelievable

bustle called a *rollo*. With twenty pounds of stiffly pleated cloth belted about her waist the wearer had tripped lightly over stony mountain trails since long before sun-up. What vanity! What pride of caste! And, yes, what a display of wealth! Everything is relative, after all, and this woman doubtless took a smug satisfaction in knowing that less fortunate Indian women would enviously count the pleats of her *rollo* and whisper to each other, "She paid fifty pesos for it, if she paid a centavo."

Her *faja*, or belt, was magically woven, and her white cotton blouse was covered with rich embroidery. She wore a heavy coral necklace with silver coins and crucifixes and little coin earrings that trembled perpetually like aspen leaves. Although I soon saw many other women similarly dressed, I never ceased to marvel at them.

When I returned to the hotel I found my companions ready to visit a falls in the neighborhood. They had engaged a mestizo lad who spoke English to act as a guide.

After driving for some time over a road full of spring-testing ruts and mud holes, we came to a clearing on a hilltop, where we saw twenty or more men mounted on horses and mules. Shouting and waving their sombreros, they dashed toward us at a gallop. Bandits! I thought. But they only wanted to offer their mounts for the steep descent to the falls. Don Pablo and I picked horses while the women chose mules fitted with seats in which they sat sideways.

The Tarascos call the falls La Tzararacua—The Sieve. The racing water overshot a high rocky cliff, foaming out of the blackness of the thick pines. Spearheads of sunlight splintered the surface into unnumbered diamond particles. But the main volume of the falls came down like doom, roaring forever into the devil's caldron below. Around the rim the reeds and white spider lilies and red-crested angel hair salaamed fearfully in the dank currents of air. Men had died attempting to swim in that ferment of reddened water at the foot of La Tzararacua.



## VI: NOBLE EXPERIMENT

HAVING killed most of the day in Uruápan by our visit to the falls of La Tzararacua, it was late afternoon when we arrived in Paracho.

The American-dressed students of the Vocational School of Agriculture for Indians—who must all be pure-blooded Tarascans—looked like foreigners in the Paracho plaza amidst the market crowds from the outlying villages who had come in regional costume. The school itself was a Moresque mushroom sprung up in the midst of the old Tarascan houses with their deep eaves and long gray shingles. And in the school the Tarascan children were being taught their own language by a young American from the University of Wisconsin!

Did these unexpected contrasts indicate a lack of harmony between the people and the project? If not, what was the meaning of the seeming superfluity of soldiers loitering about the *comandancia*?

The director of the school was a short man with a bull-like build. He wore an American overcoat with turned-up collar because Paracho is in the land of perpetual cold.

He made a short welcoming speech, but, thinking we had not understood, repeated it in what seemed to be a powerful electrical amplification of his ordinary voice. It was such an extraordinary performance we were dumb with amazement.

Convinced by our blank looks that we did not understand Spanish, he summoned an interpreter who repeated the record in broken English:

"Says you are to make self at home. Says if you like spend night can put beds in classrooms. Says if you want to know anything will be at your disposal."

As soon as the interpreter had finished, the director muttered "*Con permiso, señores*" and went away never to be seen again.

The janitor took us to our quarters.

"Do you want one room or two?" he asked, puzzled as to our individual social status.

We quickly agreed that, since we would sleep in our clothes, one room would do.

The room was as big as a barracks and as cold. It was littered with rubbish, but the janitor assured us that we would be made very comfortable. When we asked about lavatories he said they were at either end of the hall, but when we wanted to know which was for men and which for women he was momentarily stumped; then he made a hasty, and as it proved, quite arbitrary decision. Apparently the toilets were only flushed once or twice a day, while the wash basins were plugged so that the same water would serve as many people as dared to use it. At first we did not understand. But later when we wanted some water for the radiator of the car we learned that the whole supply consisted of a few inches conserved in a bath tub. This was our first experience with the scarcity of water in Mexico.

We learned that there was plenty of water in the near-by town of Cheran, but the people there, opposed to the school as a communistic step, refused to let it be piped to Paracho. They threatened to poison the water if the pipe line were laid over their protest.



We also learned that the Indians wondered why it had been necessary to call in an American philologist to teach the Tarascan language. They believe that their language is the only one out of the six hundred and more idioms spoken on the continent at the coming of the Spaniards that retains the purity of archaic culture.

"A foreigner may come to study, but not to teach us the language of our forefathers which we ourselves no longer know," they protested.

When a Tarascan professor was offered the position of master printer at Paracho he refused, saying:

"I do not think it is honorable to teach the corrupt Tarascan which is now spoken in Michoacán, nor to permit Tarascan children to learn it."

With so much discontent, I began to understand the presence of so many soldiers in the town.

The Paracho language project is entirely new. Never before have the Indians been instructed in their own language. While the early Spanish priests learned the dialect of the Indians among whom they were sent, it was only for the purpose of teaching them in turn to speak Spanish. As they burned all the Indian books and killed the custodians of indigenous culture, the Indians were left without a written literature. The Spanish policy of forcing their language on the Indians and the Indians' refusal to accept it in place of their own, has kept Mexico largely an illiterate country.

Dr. Maurice Swadesh, director of the Tarascan language project, is a tall young American of Russian descent, with thick dark eyebrows and thick dark wavy hair. He is keen-minded, active, and modest. When I asked him if there wasn't some cantina where we could have a drink and a quiet talk, he said:

"I can take you to a little place where we all go. You may think it a bit crude, but it's the best there is in Paracho."

We followed him across the plaza to a tumble-down building. Without knocking, he pushed open a worm-eaten door that

sighed lugubriously and almost fell off its hinges, and we passed into a roofless room, empty except for spiders and scorpions. Dr. Swadesh became an eerie black silhouette and then turned into a man again in the sunset glow of the ragged garden in the rear. We single-filed along a narrow path until we found ourselves in the speak-easy secrecy of a tiny back patio where red geraniums were blooming in Standard Oil tins.

An old witch, bent and deaf, appeared and dragged a rickety little table and some chairs from her dark lair out onto the corridor of the patio. We left it to Dr. Swadesh to order and got every brew in the witch's caldron. We began with *manzanilla*, a fragrant white sherry; next we had a delicious quince wine, and as a grand finale, a cup of *jالاتينا*—a rich *ronpope* made of egg, cream, and brandy in gelatine and eaten with a spoon. With this reputed aphrodisiac we were served a fruit paste called *ate*.

While we were enjoying the local liquors, I asked Dr. Swadesh how he had come to be chosen, instead of a local educator, to direct the teaching of the Indian language to the Indians.

"The job called for experts without prejudice," he said. "Every Tarascan village has a different dialect, and in order to evolve a language that would be universally acceptable, we checked a vocabulary of seven hundred and fifty Spanish words in each village for their corresponding equivalent in Tarascan. I know there are many words in our final vocabulary that are unfamiliar to many Tarascans. For instance, we use the word Purepecha instead of Phurhembecha for the Tarascan language, although some purists favor the latter. But the proof that our vocabulary is scientific is that we can teach an illiterate Tarascan to read in two daily lessons or in one week of night classes.

"In addition to a vocabulary, we had to evolve a grammar and an alphabet. Purepecha has only three tenses: the future, what is going on, and what is past and done with. It is the only language in which it is correct to be incorrect.

"As for the alphabet, it is twice as good as Spanish and three times as good as English. It has no capitals and no cursive style, thus eliminating three alphabets. Where it was possible to use Spanish letters whose sound corresponded to the Tarascan we did so, but where there was no equivalent sound in Spanish we used the letters of the Checoa alphabet, which is recognized among scientists as one of the few perfect alphabets in the world.

"I am not here to teach Tarascans Tarascan, but to teach teachers. We have twenty Indian instructors already in the field and hope soon to have one hundred."

I said: "Of course you know there is a good deal of criticism about putting the native before the national language."

Dr. Swadesh replied: "Such criticism is short-sighted and doesn't take into account that the old policy failed to make Spanish a real national language. Heretofore the teaching of Spanish in the schools has been put before every other knowledge. But the Indian becomes impatient at being kept long hours indoors listening to a language he does not understand well. Even though he knows that educated persons have a great advantage in life, he comes to feel that for him it is an impossible achievement. On the other hand, he has his corn patch and his home industry and he knows that if he tends to these well he will receive prompt and real benefits. That is why he prefers to go back to his old way of living. But once the Indian learns to read and write his own idiom it will be much easier for him to learn Spanish. I believe that education in the native tongue will open the door to the national tongue."

As a practical proof of what the project is accomplishing, Dr. Swadesh invited us to visit the printing room in the school where a little two-page weekly paper is published in Purepecha by the young masters.

It had become dark night, and while we were passing through the dimly lit school corridors, a yellow shape darted suddenly

in front of us. Doña Magdalena screamed. But the young professor chuckled and said:

"Don't be frightened. It's only our pet coyote."

In the printing room we saw a copy of the new alphabet with its strange inventions interspersed with the recognizable letters. But to show us it was quite simple, Dr. Swadesh asked one of his pupils to read aloud the latest leaflet off the press while we followed the printed page. The reading charmed us. It was like the chanting of a hymn. This new-old language which a young American has rescued from oblivion seemed to our ears one of the most musical and beautiful of tongues.

When we went to our room we found that it had been tidied and swept and furnished with four single cots from one of the dormitories. We might have been in Little America instead of tropical America, to judge by the cold; so putting on all the clothes we had and wrapping ourselves in serapes we lay down on the hard mattresses and tried to sleep.

In a moment we were all scratching furiously. Dogs began to bay at the newly risen moon. Coyotes answered from the hills. Turkeys gobbled. Donkeys brayed asininely. The clamor was worse than that of a big city. Just before dawn a hush fell over the world. Then a pandemonium of bells suddenly shattered the stillness, and the town came to life with whistling and talking.

My companions glared at me with murder in their eyes for having brought them to such an evil place. Don Pablo, who had caught a cold, could see no humor in the situation.

"Whenever you feel the urge again to get away from good roads, good food, and good beds," he said, "kindly count us out."



## VII: GUADALAJARA

I DID most of the driving over the new highway to Guadalajara while my companions, exhausted from a night of discomfort, slept in the car. It was a pleasant country through which we traveled with fields of purple and yellow cosmos and gently rolling hills forested with deep green pine. Now and again a village could be seen lying in a peaceful valley below the road, almost camouflaged by its earth-colored roofs. As we passed through the town of Zamorra we saw the fine cathedral and bishop's palace built in 1540. Then we came to the clean village of Jiquílpan, birthplace of President Cárdenas, where the houses along the main street were being refurbished in anticipation of the tourist traffic the opening of the highway was expected to bring. And before long we were swinging around the hills along the southern shore of Mexico's biggest lake—Chapala—dotted by picturesque sailing craft. It is said to derive its name from the sound its waters make as they lap the shore—*chapala, chapala, chapala*. It became apparent that we were gradually descending, and as we left the lake behind us we found ourselves in a flat dry plain across which the road stretched like a taut ribbon.

Toward evening we caught sight of the towers of Guadalajara.

I had pictured Guadalajara as a medieval city on a mountain with Moresque church towers piercing the sky. I felt let down when I found it squatting on a table-flat prickly plain. But it is a lovely city with wide paved streets, tropical gardens, houses overrun with bougainvillea, unhurried plazas, and fine old buildings, like that of the beautiful state capital whose cornerstone was laid by Mexico's first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, and the colonial palace which now houses the museum of art. It is the home of José Clemente Orozco, whose vigorous murals have brought him almost as much fame as Rivera.

We went—as everyone does—to Tlaquepaque. (Doña Maruca kept calling it, pardonably enough, Tlaque-*pulque*!) This is where you can see the Indian potters at work, molding with deft dark fingers lumps of blue-gray clay into graceful dishes and jars. They squat on the floor cross-legged, like their own ancient idols, and are as impassive. Their designs are made free-hand and painted with little dog-hair brushes which they make themselves. They draw backwards—i.e., if doing a donkey, they begin with the tail—and they never make two designs exactly alike.

From Tlaquepaque we went on to the great waterfall of Juancatlán, second only to Niagara on this continent. The road passed through vast plantations of *cacahuates*, or peanuts, and was bordered by glowing cosmos and thorny *huizache* shrubs, the flowers of which, according to our guide, were shipped to France to supply the scent of a famous perfume. The country was so dry and flat that I wondered by what magic our guide was going to produce a waterfall.

At length we approached a little town, on the outskirts of which we saw a long pond half-choked with blue water hyacinths, where scores of young women were bathing and laundering clothes. As we passed they shouted at us in jeering tones. I caught the word "*sañgrón*" and noticed our guide turn red.

"What do they mean by *sañgrón*?" I asked.

"Heavy blood—snob," he said. "They are calling me awful

names for riding in a car with tourists—say I think I am somebody, only they are putting it very impolitely.”

Leaving the car in the town, we walked to the end of a narrow street. Suddenly the falls roared into sight—a red sea of roiled water coming seemingly from nowhere and plunging over a rocky wall five hundred and twenty-four feet wide into a hidden gorge. If not the most beautiful, it is certainly one of the most incredible sights in the world. We stood staring for a long while, lost in admiration, yet wondering if, after all, we were not dreaming. Yes, we told ourselves, there it was. But when we walked a little distance away, lo! it had disappeared.

On our return to Guadalajara we passed Proletarian Park, where the workers have an outdoor theater, swimming pool, artificial lake, and free laundry. We heard the roll of drums and saw the workers drilling. Our guide told us that both men and women workers are organized for an instant call to arms—the men for service, the women for succor. They form the president's private army, said to be one hundred and sixty-five thousand strong.

“But what is it for—this private battalion?” I asked.

“Who knows?” he said. “The army is the only effective force in Mexico, and only members of it can count on sympathy or support, either in the elections or in the government. That is why our presidents always come from the army. No president can sustain his power without its support. Mexican politics has always been a function of force—and force has all the appearance of right.”

“The president knows this, and has created a private army of workers on which he believes he can always count to dominate the regular army in case it should prove fickle. The militarization of the Confederation of Workers could have no other significance.”

Guadalajara is the capital of the state of Jalisco, the territory of the Huichol Indians, one of the most primitive tribes in

Mexico, still given to worshipping old idols, sacrificing for rain, using the bow and arrow, and "hunting" the *peyote*.

One day I saw a group of Huicholes in the market. The costume of the men, almost as silly as it is striking, would catch the eye even at a Mardi Gras fiesta. Their pajama-like white pants were so wide that they looked almost like divided skirts, and their long tunic blouses were belted with a broad *faja*, intricately woven and patterned. Little carrying bags of the most delightful design were slung from their shoulders by long woven straps that crossed the chest. But the really risible feature of their costume was the hat with its small crown and wide up-turned brim all fussed up with parti-colored ribbons, fringe, and tassels. It would be a mistake, however, to call these men sissies, for there are no hardier men anywhere.

They keep a weird belief as to their genesis under their be-ribboned bonnets. Like all primitives they have a Flood story. In the Huichol version one man escaped and with him his pet bitch, which guarded his house when he went off to hunt. Always on his return the faithful bitch would be lying in the doorway waiting for him, and—what caused him to marvel greatly—there would be a meal of *tortillas* and other foods, freshly prepared. But one day, returning earlier than usual, he found in the dog's place a beautiful woman. The enchantment broken, they became the Adam and Eve of the Huicholes, who to this day call themselves, without any feeling of impropriety, *Hijos de Perra* (Sons of the Bitch).

The Huicholes consider the *peyote*—a species of cactus that grows in northern Mexico—as a bewitched deer, and organize parties to "hunt" it. These excursions, which take place from three to six times a year, are made to a certain section of the neighboring state of San Luis Potosí, and last from fourteen to fifteen days.

Several days before the hunt a religious ceremony is held in which the oldest man of the village talks with God, who advises him whom to choose for the party of *peyoteros*. Wood is then



gathered, so that the village will not lack fuel in the absence of the men, whose departure occasions loud wailing.

The chief of the *peyoteros* adorns himself with the insignia of the fire god, Tatehuare. The others dress themselves as priests and carry gourds filled with tobacco on their shoulders. They go single file, armed with bows and arrows. Each carries a cord in which he ties a knot for every day spent on the trail, while those at home keep a similar check. During the pilgrimage they abstain from eating chili and salt and from sexual intercourse. Every two or three days they fast, after which they confess themselves. When they come at last to the place of the *peyote*, they hunt it as if it were a real animal.

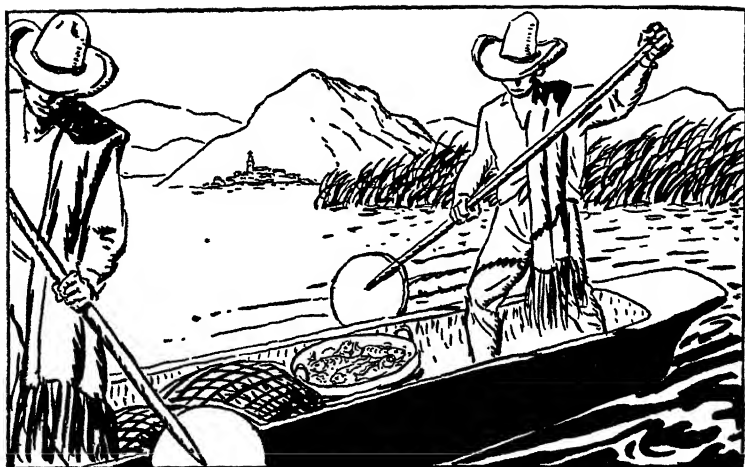
On their return to the village, the chief of the *peyoteros* enters in advance of the rest with the *peyote*, and all of the wives of the men are obliged to confess before him. If one of them has been unfaithful she must tell her husband, but he is never angry because jealousy is unknown among the Huicholes. Now the actual deer hunt begins and everyone takes part. When enough have been killed, a great public feast is held at which the merrymakers dance the fandango and get gloriously drunk on mescal and a highly intoxicating drink made from *peyote*.

When a Huichol young man falls in love he presents the girl with a squirrel, and if she accepts she weaves him a belt. The matter is then taken up by the parents, the boy's father being obliged to go to the home of the girl every day for five days and deliver a discourse. If for any reason he is unable to do so, he must hire a substitute. The theme of the first discourse is Chaos; that of the second, the birth of the Goddess-of-the-Clouds-of-the-West, which brings good luck to the girl and assures her of healthy children. The third day's discourse requires extreme tact as it has to do with the birth of the future mother-in-law. On the fourth day the speaker discusses the boy's own parentage, at the same time crying and begging pardon for mentioning these things. Finally, on the fifth day, he comes down to the real purpose of this long ritual and asks:

"Is there a girl here who wishes to marry?"

If the girl changes her mind and doesn't want to marry, her father is obliged to repeat the entire ritual in negative form. But rather than go to all that trouble he generally beats her until she consents. The girl's parents then present the boy with the hide of a deer, a hunting knife, a sleeping mat, and a serape. The bride is given away completely naked and her clothes carefully hidden to insure her not running away. In spite of this precaution should she try to escape, her parents catch her, give her a sound beating, and return her to her husband.

The day after the consummation of the marriage a wedding feast is held at which the fire priest delivers a long discourse called the "Noise of the Fire." During the feast the young couple offer each other a piece of *tortilla*. The bride shows her spirit by throwing her piece in her husband's face and trying to run away. But someone always catches her and a stick is brandished at her as a gentle reminder that she is expected to love, honor, and obey—particularly obey!



## VIII: THE TZINTZUNTZAN TITIAN

RETURNING from Guadalajara, we reached Lake Pátzcuaro at sunset—a lovely time to arrive. The eucalyptus trees and the encircling hills were melting in blackness and a blast-furnace glow illuminated the gray sky in the west and was reflected in the blushing lake. But so swiftly does the curtain-quick equatorial night fall that we had hardly time to admire the view from the piazza of our inn overlooking the water than the lake with its little white villages gleaming upon its islands and shores was blotted out by the velvety darkness.

I hoped to find at Lake Pátzcuaro the color in life that would make me want to stay and paint. I particularly wanted to see the island of Janítzio, which was on Rivera's *must* list, and as the mayor of Pátzcuaro village kindly offered us a launch for the trip, we went there the next day.

That morning I happened to pick up a Mexican magazine with an article by a woman writer describing a visit to Janítzio.

"Lake Pátzcuaro," she warbled (and I suspect she thought up the phrase before leaving Mexico City), "Lake Pátzcuaro spreads the blue of the sky over the earth."

It is really too pretty a phrase to toss into the wastebasket after one discovers that, due to its weedy shallowness, the lake is really a silvery green. We were greatly hampered by the weeds, which time and again fouled the propeller.

But my lady writer was in love with her pen—I suspect it was her only love! Recrossing the lake at sunset, she gushes:

“The lake changes color like a woman under the fire of her lover’s kisses. In reality, the little waves have the softness of lips made for kissing.”

What a pity she found only fish in Janítzio!

But that is the fault of Don Vasco de Quiroga, the colonial bishop who gave each lake village a patron saint and its own peculiar industry with a view to eliminating competition and insuring communal self-sufficiency. From his time forth Janítzio has done nothing but catch the little white fish which abound in the lake.

An ugly modern statue of Morelos on the high part of the island jars with the spirit of antiquity which is the major part of Janítzio’s charm. But it was not visible from the dock where we tied up among the native dugout canoes. In the corridors of the old tile-roofed houses which seem to be built right into the rock, we saw women patiently mending nets. Everywhere brown nets were hung out to dry. Cotton thread for making nets was strung the length of every block. It was as though the village were caught in the materials of its industry, like a spider fouled in its own web.

The view from the crest of Janítzio island was superb. The lake lay below us with its silvery green waters forever moving in long blunt swells. Four other islands, none so high as Janítzio, dotted the surface, and each had its romantic little town with a white church gleaming above a cluster of tile roofs. On the mainland, the president’s villa was visible, crowning a green hill.

We found that we could go inside the huge statue. In it the life story of Morelos is portrayed in a series of murals painted by anonymous artists.

José María Morelos y Pavón was born near Apatzingan, in Michoacán, in 1765, the son of a mestizo carpenter. He began life as a muleteer, but later took holy orders. When Father Hidalgo raised his "Cry of Dolores" which started the revolt from Spain, Morelos joined him in the field. Soon he showed himself a born commander. When Hidalgo was captured and executed on July 31, 1811, Morelos became the leader of the insurgents. So brilliant were his military exploits that Napoleon, reading of them, exclaimed: "With three such men I could conquer the world." The first constitutional congress named him generalissimo and chief executive. Defeated by imperialist Iturbide, he was shot by a firing squad at San Cristóbal Ecatepec on December 22, 1815.

As we put out from Janitzio it seemed that the entire female population of the island had come down to the water to bathe and wash their finery for the big market in Pátzcuaro on the morrow. The scene was like a Zorn etching.

We headed for Jarácuaro, which we had chosen as the most interesting-looking of the other island villages we had seen from above Janitzio. But while we were still nearly a quarter of a mile offshore the water became so weedy that the launch could proceed no further, and our pilot was obliged to hail two Indians in a dugout canoe to come and take us off. The oarsmen stood in the prow and stern and rowed with long sweeping strokes. I understood now why the paddles have the curious circular shape, so much better adapted to weed work than long-bladed oars.

A large new school building stands on the edge of town where it will impress visitors, but the old church, while open, bears the scars of neglect, and the plaza before it was overgrown with weeds. There was hardly any life in the streets except for an occasional donkey, desultorily switching its tail to brush the flies off its rump, or a skinny dog scratching its fleas. But as we passed the windowless white houses we heard the whirr of sewing machines and peering into the dark open doorways we discovered that the whole town was engaged in making sombreros.

Doubtless it has been doing so since the days of Bishop Quiroga, but how surprised he would be to return and find Mr. Singer's product in every home. The cost of a machine rides every family like a mortgage, but to own one is their greatest ambition.

As you enter the village of Pátzcuaro you circle a statue to the Tarascan martyr Calzontzín, whom Nuño de Guzman, the cruel conqueror of Michoacán, burned at the stake.

Pátzcuaro is a place of quaint corners and fine old Spanish buildings. It has two plazas—Plaza Chica and Plaza Grande. There was a large pottery market in the former, but most of the vendors were bent on the latter. In the connecting street the *puestos* were up, and tiny Indian furniture, wooden and clay toys, miniature guitars from Paracho, and serviceable earthenware cooking utensils were being offered for sale.

Plaza Grande was like a brilliant Oriental bazar. There were fish from Janítzio, sombreros from Jarácuaro, lacquered gourds from Uruápan, and red-and-black serapes woven in Pátzcuaro. There were besides countless other products from other villages which still continue the industries taught them by the mission priests so many, many years ago.

Tropical fruits and vegetables with delicious-sounding names were set out in pyramids on square mats—*jiltomates* (little green tomatoes in papery pods), *cidras*, *chabanacos*, *chirimoyas*, *granados de china*, *mameys*, tamarinds, and guavas. The eye saw them all but the nose could only distinguish the odor of the guavas which filled the air as if it had been sprayed with spirits of turpentine.

There were curious Indian foods—cakes made of the eggs of the marsh fly, like a fine roe, which are found adhering to the rushes in the shallows of the lake, and a sort of tamale made of the flies themselves, pounded to a paste and boiled in corn husks.

Laughing, bantering, bargaining endlessly, the Indians seemed to take the *tianguis* in the spirit of a fiesta. They sat on the ground, for the Indian has remained so close to the soil that he

is most comfortable sitting on it. Mothers nursed their babies with no more shame for bare breasts than for bare feet. They shouted "*Perro! Perro!*" at the scavenging dogs that came too near their foodstuffs.

The men in their woven leather *buaraches*, white *calzones*, colored shirts, serapes on their shoulders, and dark faces shaded to mere blots under big, fancifully trimmed sombreros, stalked through the crowds like actors in a Mexican light opera. Their heads have a conical shape as if their foreheads were still forced back by binding in infancy as in ancient times.

Every woman wore a *reboso*—that long scarf introduced from Spain which has been almost universally adopted by the Mexican Indians, who know how to wear it with infinite grace but too often use it to cover unkempt hair.

All these people had come to sell their produce and buy whatever was needed in their particular village. Since they cannot return with the merchandise they came with, they must be shrewd bargainers. But in most large markets there are middlemen, called *acaparadores*, usually whites or mestizos, who buy for shipment to other more important centers and who take advantage of the Indian's necessity to pay them shameful prices.

When an Indian has sold his goods, bought some indispensable supplies, and gathered the news of the world, he goes to the church to pray, give alms and offer candles to his patron saint, after which he gets drunk with his friends and returns to his native village to resume his life of work and misery.

The middleman, on the other hand, who produces nothing, risks nothing, and has no responsibility, grows rich through the exploitation of the Indian's industry and ignorance of how to help himself. The growing tourist demand for serapes, *reberos*, pottery, basketry, and curios of all sorts—the wonderful Indian arts and crafts which give Mexico a genuine personality—has brought new profits to the middleman, but left the Indian as poor as before.

In spite of the color and interest of the places I had visited since leaving Mexico City, I had seen nothing to equal Guatemala. There remained only one unvisited village on Rivera's list for Michoacán—Tzintzuntzan. But I had seen the poppy-red skirts of the women in the market at Pátzcuaro and knew what to expect. What really attracted me to Tzintzuntzan now was a painting, said to be by Titian.

One often hears and reads of the great paintings that came to the New World in colonial times, but I had yet to see one. Of course, there is always the explanation that, with the crumbling of the aristocracy and the church, these paintings passed into the hands of foreign collectors. I was excited at the prospect of seeing an Old Master which, if genuine, would be the greatest that ever came to Mexico.

The story of the Tzintzuntzan Titian is that it was presented to Bishop Quiroga by Phillip II of Spain in recognition of his humanitarian labors among the Tarascos. Regardless of its enormous cash value it has hung, undisturbed by revolutions and the impoverishment of the church, in the crumbling and deserted cathedral of Tzintzuntzan, whose Indian inhabitants attribute to it miraculous powers.

In his *White Umbrella in Mexico* the American artist and writer, F. Hopkinson Smith, tells of his pilgrimage to Tzintzuntzan fifty years ago to see the famous Titian. He was convinced of its authenticity and made a sketch copy of it. Thinking himself alone with the masterpiece, he climbed upon some furniture to examine the brush strokes under a magnifying glass. Suddenly the room filled with angry Indians who would have torn him limb from limb but for the intervention of the parish priest. The quick-witted explanation that the American artist, having lost his sense of color, had made a pilgrimage to Tzintzuntzan in the belief that if he could but touch the miraculous Titian his faculty would be restored, saved the situation. The Indians stared in awe at his sketch as a visible miracle and allowed him to depart in peace.



The painting hangs in the nave of the cathedral and is covered by a faded curtain. When, after some difficulty, we succeeded in locating the caretaker, he suggested that we mount the pulpit to view it when he pulled the draw cord. (The alms box is by the guard rail.) Keyed up for a great experience, I stared at the painting in profound disappointment. No matter from what angle I looked at it I could not convince myself that it was a real Titian.

I do not question the judgment of F. Hopkinson Smith, and I am sure he had too much integrity to sacrifice truth for the sake of a good story. I question whether I saw the same painting he saw. The fact that it is not in the same part of the cathedral in which he describes seeing it suggests to me that during the removal there may have been a substitution. In the present painting there are none of the qualities that make Titian the greatest of the Renaissance painters—superlative drawing, composition, and glowing color. It is plainly a second-rate copy. If it were one of the greatest art treasures in the world would it be left carelessly unguarded in this empty church in a Mexican Indian village?

But where is the real Titian?

Part Two  
LIFE WITH  
THE INDIANS







## IX: SOUTH TO OAXACA

**B**ACK in the capital, I parted from my companions and made reservations on the first Serrabia plane for Oaxaca.

I wanted a tough American who knew outdoor Mexico, horses, and Indians, and liked all three, to go with me on my trip through the mountains from Oaxaca to Yalalag and Tehuantepec. It was a large order to fill on a moment's notice in a strange country, and I had no idea how to do it.

In passing Sanborn's I chanced upon an American newspaper correspondent whom I had met on my first stay in Mexico City. He was with a Mexican, a former high official who had lost his post because of his honesty. (My friend told me he had refused a half-million-dollar bribe.) Three months ago his son had been killed defending his property from the agrarians—a common tragedy of the "bloodless" revolution.

When the Mexican left us, my friend and I went to lunch, and I told him of my proposed trip through the mountains.

"Do you carry a gun?" he asked.

"No."

He showed me a big Colt Peacemaker—one of those accurate

frontier-day six-shooters—which he always carried tucked in his belt.

"Can you carry a gun without a license?" I asked.

"This is my license," he said, taking a small derringer from his pants pocket.

"Is all that armament really necessary?"

"You never can tell. The government's program of confiscation is teaching the people to steal instead of to work. It has broken down their moral fiber. You may never be attacked, but the chances are ten to one that you may."

He spoke from knowledge, for he has spent most of his forty-odd years in Mexico. He has had experience with bandits and Indians. He told me of a tribe of Indians so hostile to outsiders they put them in a cage to starve to death or cut off the soles of their feet and send them back in "red socks" as a warning to others. There are many such unconquered tribes in Mexico, who refuse all contact with whites.

"A while ago I received a note by Indian messenger from a Mexican everybody believes to be dead," he said. "It is years since he suddenly disappeared in order to escape political enemies. The note said he had taken refuge with a tribe of savage Cora Indians whom he had convinced he was a white god. They built a house for him, gave him several wives, and brought him food, but kept him under constant guard. He had learned their language and tribal secrets, including the whereabouts of a cave filled with treasure cached at the time of the conquest. With the help of another white man he believed he could get the treasure and escape, and to this end he had prepared the Indians for the coming of a second white god."

"Did it sound too fishy to be worth the risk?"

"No. I believe it was all on the level. But I couldn't leave my family for the time it would take to carry out the scheme. Besides, my wife objected to my taking several Indian wives!"

I said: "Would you like to go with me on my trip?" for it seemed to me I had found my man.

"I'd like to," he said. "Sounds like a lot of fun. But I can't leave the city. However, my son could go."

I thought if the son were at all like the father he would do.

"How old is he?" I asked.

"Twenty."

"You're not afraid to let him go on a trip like this?"

"No. He can take care of himself anywhere. When I had my hacienda the agrarians were more afraid of him than of anyone else on the place. They knew there was no monkey business about him. He would shoot and shoot to kill."

"Can he handle horses?"

"Brought up with them. When he was only thirteen years old he and another boy of eleven rode a couple of blooded race-horses three hundred miles across the desert."

His son came to see me the next morning, and I have to laugh now when I recall the uneasiness I felt at first sight as to his fitness for a hard ride through mountainous country little known to white men. I had looked for a rugged youth with hard hands and a tanned outdoor look. Instead Vicho—I will give him now the name given him later by a Zapotec beauty of Yalalag—appeared almost girlishly delicate in spite of his six feet. Pale and thin with narrow features and a queer trick of hunching his shoulders forward that made him look flat-chested and weak, he seemed more like a bookworm than a boy who had wrangled horses on a Mexican ranch. There was a hint of the dandy in his little blond mustache and his too blond, too wavy, too oily hair. But his most distinctive feature—his large blue eyes which earned him his Zapotec nickname of Vicho (Clear-eyed)—were level and clear, and I soon realized from our talk that he had a very level and clear young head. But I never would have guessed his amazing strength if I had not seen him in action. Once when he had carried an awkward forty-pound bundle on his shoulder over a thirty-mile night-blackened trail, I asked him where he got such strength and endurance. He replied quietly that he thought strength was nine-tenths spirit.

Born in the United States, Vicho was taken by his parents to England when he was a small baby. One day he was left alone in his crib by the fireplace. Too adventurous even then, he was fascinated by the crackling flames and decided to investigate. Soon his mother heard cries and arrived in time to snatch him from the fire, but not in time to save him from almost fatal burns which deeply seared the flesh of his right side. It was years before he was able to walk. One day when we were swimming in a river I noticed the long ugly scar, and he told me the story.

Vicho was still a lad when his father came to Mexico and acquired a six-hundred-thousand acre ranch. He grew up without the benefit of regular schooling but with the sort of education that develops courage, competence, and self-reliance—qualities which American youth in these soft days seems in danger of losing.

"Dad always told me," Vicho once said to me, "that when you live in a foreign country you have to win the respect of the natives by being not only as good as they are, but better."

He had had to become superior especially in those matters best understood by the Mexicans and by which they judge a man—horsemanship and fighting. Not naturally strong, Vicho had made up the deficiency by sheer grit and by learning to use his head as well as his body. He had learned to disarm a man with a knife by a trick of jiu-jitsu. He had broken a wild horse that had successively thrown several Mexican horse wranglers by staying in the saddle after he had been jarred into momentary insensibility. He had run in front of a bull that was charging a girl when all other onlookers were petrified with fear. Fortunately even the bull was bewildered by his heroism and stopped short in its tracks. On our travels together he constantly demonstrated American superiority to all and sundry Mexicans until I gave up pretending to emulate him.

He showed his indifference to danger by his contempt for really necessary precautions, such as typhoid injections, quinine, and mosquito bars. And as I put the equipping of our trip into

his hands we ran grave dangers from which our immunity was purely providential. We spent the day making preliminary plans and purchases, and then bade each other "*Hasta luego.*" He joined me again two weeks later in Oaxaca and was with me to the end of my travels.

The little Serrabia plane shot like a red torpedo through a ceiling of leaden clouds into the sparkling world above, where from a cottony plain, rose the peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl glistening white with snow—that miracle of the tropics. It was the first time I had seen the two peaks.

There were four other men—apparently all traveling salesmen—squeezed into the compact cabin. They were all silent and tense.

I opened a copy of *El Excelsior* and looked over the news. The first item that caught my eye reported an airplane accident in which five people died. I turned from that to the suicide of an American gangster who had been hiding out in Mexico City. It said that he had been known for his kindness to little children. In the next column was the story of a shooting in the notorious Tenampa café. A Mexican had shot the girl he had taken there because she had called him a cheap skate for not giving the waiter a bigger tip. He made a get-away, leaving the girl lying on the floor with a bullet wound in her head. She was sent to the morgue, where a while later she came to, stretched out naked on a slab in the company of corpses. The Tenampa is a place where people go late at night for a *gallo*, or serenade, by musicians from Jalisco who look like bandits. Starving artists make portrait caricatures of you for which you are expected to give them fifty centavos instead of suing for libel. I had been there earlier on the night of the shooting.

Mexican papers are always full of murders. Murder seems to be the Mexican way of settling every little inconvenience. One newspaper remarked editorially that in the days of Diaz the country was so safe that events were remembered as having taken



place before or after such and such a murder, but that today murders are so common that any man who walks up the Paseo de la Reforma after midnight is either a fool or a hero.

When I looked out the window all I could see was a raging sea of white foam upon which floated the ice caps of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl. Then another ice cap—Orizaba—appeared. Orizaba is 18,000 feet above the sea—Mexico's highest peak. But how puny it looked from the air! How puny is the highest mountain, since it can be moved by man's faith and hopped over by his ingenuity.

Suddenly the great cloud sea which looked so stormy and at the same time so still, came to an end, and at a dizzy depth below appeared a tumbled world of green mountains. Ochreish trails, like lines drawn on a map, wriggled along the ridges, but there were no signs of habitation.

The young Mexican in front of me turned around and said in good English:

"Now you can see how underpopulated Mexico is. We have an area a quarter that of the United States, capable of supporting fifty million people and inhabited by only sixteen million. Our immigration policy is all wrong. That is why Mexico is so backward, while Argentina, the United States, and Canada, which have intelligent immigration regulations, are prosperous and democratic.

"We are taught to hate foreigners in general and Americans in particular. Our histories try to make us believe that we never lost a war; that we are invincible. As a result we are ignorant and provincial. We need people from other countries to come here and teach us how to live."

The outspokenness of the press and people of Mexico is very surprising and one of the country's healthiest signs.

My companion said that the indolence that is regarded as a Mexican characteristic is in reality only a sort of sit-down strike against political and economic injustice.

"Everybody, except the politician, is underpaid, and that saps

energy and ambition," he went on. "People feel that it is no use. They place their faith in the national lottery, and can only be aroused by revolutionary talk, because they have no opportunity to get rich except through luck or banditry.

"If I win the lottery I want to go to the United States. I would like to marry an American girl. Mexican women hate American women, but Mexican men prefer them to their own. Our only fear is that they will not think us clever enough if we don't make lots of money. Two hundred and fifty pesos a week is a large salary in Mexico, but its equivalent of fifty dollars would be considered small in the United States."

When I asked him why he preferred American women, he said:

"American women know how to use their independence, but when Mexican women assert themselves they are terrible."

He said he believed that in Mexico jealousy was more common among men, and in the United States, among women.

We had been flying at an elevation of eleven thousand feet, but a painful pressure on my ear drums told me that we were rapidly losing altitude.

"Monte Alban!" exclaimed my companion, pointing to a dry hill toward which we were swooping. I stared hard, but was unable to see the famous Zapotec ruins which in 1931 yielded the richest archaeological treasure ever found in America—the Monte Alban jewels.

Now we dove on Oaxaca, a flat pattern of brown roofs, patios, and streets, and presently we lit as lightly as a feather upon the flying field.



## X: MYSTERIES OF MONTE ALBAN

**O**AXACA, with its pleasant climate, pleasant landscape, pleasant mingling of old and new, is the pleasantest city in Mexico.

Oaxaca was the center of the ancient Zapotec and Mixtec culture, and the ruins of Monte Alban and Mitla and the fine collection of relics in the fascinating Regional Museum show how rich that culture was.

I visited the museum again and again to see the little obsidian knives with which the priests pricked themselves in their penitential rites; the graceful pottery molded by cunning hands before the potter's wheel was known; the clay incensarios modeled to represent fantastic deities; the pottery fragment on which is clearly engraved a sheaf of wheat, seemingly disproving the prevalent belief that the cereal was imported by the Spaniards; and a magnificently sculptured seated figure of a high priest, extremely Egyptian in feeling and unsurpassed by the art of any age.

But nothing brings home the refinement of ancient American culture so conclusively as the Monte Alban jewels.

Every piece is classically pure in design and executed, despite the most primitive tools, with a flawless, Cellini-like artistry. I moved from case to case with growing astonishment at their beauty and perfection. There was the golden diadem with a plume of beaten gold; a golden breastplate representing the head of a warlord in the jaws of a jaguar; necklaces of gold, pearl, and turquoise; obsidian earstuds and knives; jade rings, necklaces, and lip ornaments; castanet-shaped tweezers of silver and copper alloy; gold beads representing turtles; plaques of jet and amber; vessels of translucent white onyx and rock crystal; exquisitely carved jaguar and deer bones, like old Chinese ivories; and a human skull covered with turquoise mosaic—macabre war trophy.

There was a gorgeous necklace which one could picture on the neck of a beautiful pagan princess; but such finery was reserved by the Indians for men—for kings and high priests. How many thousands of golden gems, plundered from the living and the dead by the avaricious Spaniards, were ruthlessly melted down for their metal content! Only the merest chance kept this glittering collection of artistic riches sealed in an ancient tomb from the hands of the riflers of sanctuaries.

Every object in the collection has a symbolic meaning. Even the little discs, half gold and half silver, joined by some process unknown to modern jewelers, symbolizes night and day, life and death.

A golden mask of the god Xipe Totec, Our God of the Flayed, gives a glimpse into ancient ritual. In order to make the earth fruitful a prisoner of war would be killed at the time the sun was at its zenith. The body was then flayed and a priest dressed in the skin to symbolize divinity in the human image. The mask vividly depicts the over layer of skin, the half-open mouth and eyes, and even the gruesome detail of the cords which support the skin. Filigree is used to represent the tuft of hair which warriors allowed to grow on the side of the head.

Xipe Totec was not only the god of vegetation and corn, but

of the goldsmiths and mosaic workers as well, for the corn is a natural mosaic and the skin is like a sheet of gold.

I was fortunate in having as guide on my visit to the ruins of Monte Alban Señor Martín Bazán, who ably assisted Señor Alfonso Caso in the opening of the treasure tomb and who is directing the actual work.

It was a short trip by car over a good dirt road to the top of the 1,180-foot hill where the principal buildings are grouped about the Plaza of the Sun.

No one can guess the age of Monte Alban. Some vanished race before the Zapotecs left stones there carved with figures which have all the characteristics of the art, not of ancient America, but of Asia Minor. But at the zenith of its greatness, between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, it was a Zapotecan fortified city named Danipaguache. The warlike Mixtecs from the west drove out the inhabitants, occupied the site, and changed the name to Yucunane. Then, shortly before the Spanish conquest, the Aztecs took the city and renamed it Ocelotepec (Hill of the Tiger).

The Plaza of the Sun measures six hundred and fifty by one thousand feet and is surrounded by walls, tombs, terraces, temples, palaces, forts, pyramids, great flights of steps, sunken sports arena, and triumphal arch, all built of solid masonry without the aid of the wheel, the last construction often hiding others beneath, and nearly all connected by a system of underground defense tunnels, like primitive Maginot lines. All these huge blocks of stone were carried on the backs of men, worked by skilled masons, and set in unburned lime. Those used for facing were often wonderfully carved.

Señor Bazán first took me to see the narrow gallery somewhat unscientifically called the Gallery of the Dancers. Here were stone slabs, some in place, others lying about, which are covered in low relief with figures entirely dissimilar to any others ever found in America and which bear hieroglyphics undecipherable by any of the keys to inscriptions so far discovered in Mexico or Central America. While some of the figures are dancing, others

appear to be swimming or engaged in free-style wrestling. All have some deformity—could Monte Alban have been a sort of Lourdes?—and a few seem to have hermaphroditic characteristics.

These carved slabs belong to the earliest epoch in the history of the site, and were torn from the first edifice built, possibly during the third epoch, when it was covered over by another structure. Only in these crude early carvings are there nude figures, and only in one instance is a woman represented. At least Señor Bazán said it was a woman, although it was as slender as a boy and had no breasts or other indication of sex beyond the flowing and delicate lines of the reclining pose and the flower held daintily in one slender hand.

The second epoch in Monte Alban, during which the lines of the carvings are noticeably finer and the technique greatly improved, was the period of conquest, marked by the erection of the triumphal arch in the Plaza of the Sun. The arch is not true, for the Indians never mastered the form. The face of the monument is covered by the coats of arms of over sixty villages conquered by the Zapotecs. Señor Bazán explained the meaning of the heraldic devices, in which the symbol of the village always appears over the portrait of the conquered cacique, his name glyph, date glyph, and representations of the tribute exacted. Many of the villages are still in existence.

"For instance," he pointed out, "this coat of arms has three chilis over a hill. That is the symbol for Chilitepec (Hill of the Chilis). The cacique's name was Four Serpent Turquoise, and he was defeated on the day of Eight House. Here you see the tribute he had to pay—so many bales of cotton, jadeite beads, and pottery vases.

"The date glyphs show that the Zapotecs had the same calendrical system as the Mayas, whose culture they shared. Their year began on the twelfth of March when the sun crosses the equator and the monument doesn't cast a shadow. There were eighteen months of twenty days each and five days over. Every

four years they added a day, as we do at leap year. There were thirty-six day names, and babies were named for the day on which they were born. But as there were no names for the five extra, or lost days, a child that had the mischance to be born on one of those days was named by the priest in a special christening ceremony to rid him of evil spirits."

Leaving the triumphal arch, we climbed a broken flight of steps to the top of a truncated pyramid where had stood a temple of the third epoch. This was the great epoch of building during which many of the old pyramids were built upon anew. Why this was done is a mystery, unless there was a religious motive for periodically renewing certain monuments. During this great epoch the colored stone of the valley of Oaxaca—green *cantera* and purple *teitipac*—was used for the first time.

Only the stone foundation of the temple remains. This was carried to a height of two to four feet. The walls were made of adobe and the rooms were roofed with thatch. The elevated rooms were for the altars and the others for the priests. Two braziers glowed perpetually with the sacred fires, tended by neophytes. Before them were placed the sacrificial altars with a channel to direct the flow of the victim's blood over the face of the god carved on front.

I had read in Father Gay's *Historia de Oaxaca* that the Zapotecs never sacrificed human victims. I asked Señor Bazán about this.

"Father Gay was partial to the Zapotecs," he said, "and wanted to make them appear morally elevated. But on occasion they sacrificed and even ate the flesh of human victims, as we take the sacrament."

It should be remembered, however, that sacrificial victims were prisoners of war. Indian warriors were trained, not to kill, but to take prisoners, so that sacrifice took the place of slaughter in war.

The toe of my shoe overturned what appeared to be a bit of glass, but on picking it up I saw that it was the edge of an ob-

sidian knife—a knife that had doubtless cut the living heart from the breast of many a man who had died on the stone of sacrifice.

Next to the temple was a tomb in the form of a cross in which was found only some human teeth, filed in fourteen different shapes and carved and decorated with jade and nephrite. The cross was used in Aztec and Maya religion before the time of the Spaniards, but it is thought to have symbolized the four Sun Gods—Sun of Tiger, Sun of Wind, Sun of Rain, and Sun of Water; the four gods of creation—Xipe Totec, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and Huitzilopochtli—or the four cardinal points.

Señor Bazán now took me to see Tomb Number Seven—the treasure tomb. On our way we passed the great stairway, said to be the widest in America. It has been built upon three times, but this mighty labor increased its height by only two feet.

The fourth epoch in Monte Alban was one of decadence. Objects from Teotihuacan and Central America belong to this period. The Zapotecs traded with both the Aztecs and the Mayas and made pilgrimages to certain shrines, like that of Esquipulas, in Guatemala. On the way to the shrine the pilgrims were housed and fed in the villages along the way, and on their return would bring precious stones as relics to the people who had befriended them.

When, in the fifth epoch, the Mixtecs took possession of Monte Alban, they cleaned out the Zapotec tombs and used them to bury their own dead, brought with them from the tombs of their former capital of Tilantongo. The skeletons of nine persons were found in Tomb Number Seven. They are supposed to have been kings and priests instead of warriors, as no weapons, except a single copper hatchet, were found with them. The smallness of some of the rings and bracelets found still encircling the fingers and forearms of some of the skeletons, however, gives reason to believe that one or more of them may have been women.

The tombs are located under the floors of the houses, and as



many are decorated with sculpture, carvings, and wall paintings, they must have been prepared well in advance of the occupant's death. Often the bones of a dog were found with those of the master, as the Zapotecs believed the spirit must cross a wide river and the spirit of the dog would help that of its master to swim it.

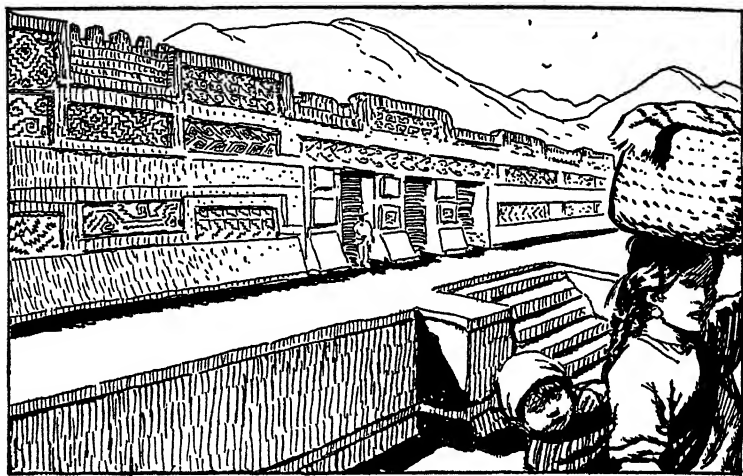
In the vestibule of Tomb Number Seven were found some Zapotecan funerary urns guilefully left there by the Mixtecs to prevent anyone of the enemy race from disturbing it. All the five hundred and more items found within the tomb are of Mixtec origin.

More than one hundred tombs at Monte Alban have been opened by the Mexican archaeologists, but the only one containing treasure was Tomb Number Seven. It is passing strange that the Spaniards, who systematically rifled all tombs in their greed for gold, should have missed this one. At the time of its discovery a fierce controversy raged between the Mexican scientists as to the authenticity of the jewels, and wild stories are still afloat. I heard a fantastic rumor that the collection had belonged to a lady in the court of Empress Carlotta—my informant couldn't remember her name—whose Oaxacan servant had absconded with it after the fall of Maximilian. I was also told that an ancient map of Monte Alban exists in which the location of Tomb Number Seven is indicated.

Señor Bazán, however, assured me that the authenticity of the jewels had been established beyond a doubt. The map I had heard about, he said, was of Mixtec, and not Spanish, origin. When the Mixtecs abandoned Monte Alban they made a careful map of the site with the intention of building their new town in conformity with it. This map still exists in the archives of the town of Xoxocotlán.

Another puzzling circumstance is how Ocelotepec got the name of Monte Alban. The general supposition is that it was named by the Spanish conqueror of Oaxaca, Francisco de Orozco,

in honor of Mont Albano, Italy, where he once saw service. At the time he first beheld the mountain there was still a lake at its foot which may have increased its resemblance to the Italian resort.



## XI: I GO TO HELL

**M**ITLA, in Aztec, means Hell. It is twenty miles from Oaxaca over a portion of the Inter-American Highway-to-be. The road was rutted and deep in dust. But who could complain of dust? The archaeologists who explored Mitla went through, not an hour, but centuries of dust.

On the way I stopped at Santa María del Tule to see the famous cypress which probably was alive before the first stone was laid at Mitla. No one would have noticed it then. But, like Mr. Phinney's turnip, it grew and grew. After many centuries the Indians saw it and, marveling, went down on their knees and worshiped it as the god of growth. Still it grew. And when the Spaniards came they too marveled, and built a church beside it. And now, four hundred years later, it has grown into the biggest known tree in the world, with a circumference seventeen feet greater than the largest California redwood, and the Mexican government has made it into a national monument. A regiment could stand in its shade, but still it continues to flourish, annually adding to its height, girth, and luxuriance with undiminished vigor. Perhaps it is still a sapling!

Beyond Santa María del Tule I passed Santiago de los Borrachos (St. James of the Drunks) and two stony hills—one called White Horse, riddled by ancient cave dwellings which today shelter lonely shepherds; the other, unescapably, called the Sleeping Woman. The figure of a woman lying on her back and well advanced in pregnancy is almost sculpturally formed.

I detoured again at Tlacolula, a miserable town with a splendid old church. The Chapel of Our Lord of the Cross with its wonderful wrought iron gates and baroque mural decoration is one of the finest in Mexico.

As I approached Mitla I saw Indians turning the earth for the winter wheat by means of a wooden plow drawn by oxen. Ox carts with solid wooden wheels and high sides hung with nets passed in the road. Women and children sat inside the nets like birds in a cage.

Mitla seems to belong to ancient Greece or Babylon. It is totally unlike any other city in America. It bears no resemblance even to Monte Alban, built by the Zapotecs in the same era. It has, in fact, no counterpart in the world. Legend says that the Zapotec builders were inspired by the god-hero Quetzalcoatl.

Mitla is built on a low hill, unprotected from attack. It is a city, not of pyramids, but of low walls enclosing narrow courts. It was built as a residence for the high priest and as a tomb. Mitla, or Hell, signifies "place of souls."

The amazing mosaic fretwork of the walls is, in its originality and perfection, a wonder effect of mural decoration. These mosaics are not composed of small bits as is the case of nearly all such work, but are stone tiles which, while taking their place in the design, continue the construction of the wall. It is estimated that more than a million such stone tiles were used. The stone work is so perfect that no mortar was used, and it is almost impossible to see the joining.

The walls of the buildings are nearly as wide as the rooms they enclose. But a tremendous innovation for the time was made in the famous Hall of Columns, where the builders set up six stone

columns which enabled them to make a room one hundred and twenty-five feet long by twenty-three feet wide. As there are no windows in any of the buildings, light and air could enter the rooms only from the patio around which they were built. For some curious reason the walls are wider at the top than at the bottom. The stone lintels over the low doorways weigh as much as fifteen tons. How they were put in place is something to think about. Some of the lintels are marvelously carved, while here and there are patches of paintings that have escaped the tooth of time.

The high priest, who had all the authority, pomp, and prestige of a Catholic pope, slept and gave audience in a high hall of the palace. And such was the respect in which he was held that no one—not even the king—dared enter his sanctum. Private passages were used for entering and going out from an audience.

In the sanctuary for the idols was a stone altar for use in the great feasts or the funeral of a king or cacique.

Fray Francisco de Burgoa, in his *Historia Geografia* published in Mexico in 1674, thus describes one of these awful rites:

The Superior gave orders to the lesser priests to arrange the vestments and decorate the temple and prepare the incense. They went down with a great escort and without any of the people seeing them, nor was it permitted to the people to turn their faces toward the procession, the priests having persuaded them that they would fall dead in the act of disobedience.

On entering the temple the priest put on a long white cotton robe and over it another one embroidered with figures of beasts and birds and made in the manner of a surplice or chasuble. Upon the head he had something in the style of a mitre and upon his feet another invention woven with thread of different colors. And thus arrayed he came with great pomp and ceremony to the altar.

Making deep obeisance to the idols, he renewed the incense and began to mumble between his teeth and talk to these figures, the depositaries of infernal spirits. And in this form he continued to commune with

these deformed and horrible objects which overcame all who beheld them with terror and amazement, until he recovered from his diabolical trance and then told the spectators all the fictitious and fabulous stories which the spirit had persuaded him of, or which he had invented.

When he was obliged to make human sacrifices, the ceremonies were doubled and the ministers bent the victim across a great stone and, opening the breast with knives, they tore it apart during the horrible contortions of the body; and they bared the heart, which they tore out with the soul, and which they gave to the Devil. They carried the heart to the High Priest that he might offer it to the idols, putting it to their lips with more ceremonies. The body they threw into what they called the sepulcher of the blessed.

It is believed that the entrance to this sepulcher is sealed by a huge stone at the back of one of the cruciform tombs underneath the palace, where still may be seen the Column of Death. According to tradition, when priests or nobles were condemned to death, they were strapped to this column and left, like Tantalus, with water and dishes of aromatic foods placed just beyond reach until they died in the agony of starvation.

Some authorities think that the sepulcher connects with the underground caves which tradition says extend for three hundred miles, as far as Mexico City! Bodies of captains who had perished in war even in distant lands were brought here for interment. And priests and nobles determined on religious self-sacrifice, or the poor driven to votive suicide, would pass on the other side of the great slab that sealed them in a living tomb, there to wander in the shadows amid bloody bones and putrefying flesh, denied all earthly succor, until they died horribly of hunger and infection.

In the sixteenth century an expedition of monks sent to investigate these caves returned with such frightful accounts that the church ordered the entrance sealed forever.

Mitla is well named Hell.



## XII: MARKET IN OAXACA

SATURDAY came and with it a multitude of marketers from every compass point, from valley town and eagle-nest village. It was like an invasion. All came on foot, burro-back, or bus. Some had left their homes that morning; others had trotted from four to six days over toilsome trails.

Overnight Oaxaca had become a mosaic of every clan. Now was my chance to see every costume the region offered, to decide which were the most picturesque and colorful. So, notebook in hand, I joined the throng. But as I threaded my way through the stalls and *puestos* I saw only the familiar Mexican silhouette—men with white *calzones* and serapes and women with full skirts and *rebosos*.

And yet this great drab market was colorful, for the word has more than one sense. So many thousands of Indians filling the immense shadowy market enclosures and overflowing into the sunlit streets could not fail to make a gay scene. Streets were closed to traffic and opened to traffickers. Women held flapping fowls in my face—"Buy chicken," "Buy turkey"—dogs with washboard ribs slunk between my legs; babies with

naked brown bottoms crawled underfoot. The streets had become counters of plain and fancy pottery; pyramids of exotic fruits and vegetables were piled upon mats and shaded by rude parasols of cloth and matting. Raw meat and dried *tasajo* (jerky) gathered flies and emitted choking odors. Huge pots of greasy stews simmered over charcoal braziers in the open-air restaurants. Dogs urinated on the legs of the tables where people were eating. Parrots screamed. Constantly my sleeve was plucked by overweening market women with textiles to sell—luncheon cloths and napkins woven in bright stripes with figures of birds and idols. Cutlery vendors waved glinting daggers. Whenever I paused to make a pencil sketch I was set upon by the flies and the lottery vendors who were as thick as flies.

It would be impossible to name all the strange foods I saw—*tortillas* as big as hat brims, round balls of cane sugar, sour smelling *pulque*, candied roots, fried pigskin, *tuna* cheese (cactus paste), maguey worms, dried minnows, fried grasshoppers. . . .

I can't say these strange foods enticed me. But I did become fond of one article of food—as a pet. That was a baby *coati mundi*, a raccoonlike ring-tailed cat which has some of the characteristics of a bear cub, a puppy, and a monkey. It was extraordinarily fearless and playful and would climb upon my shoulder, sniff in my ears, and nip my hand when I tried to put it down. I used to stop and play with it every time I passed it in the market, and at last I could not bear the thought of its being consigned to the stew pot. But how I came to buy it—or rather her, for she became a person with a name—is a story that belongs to a later chapter.

My only purchase in the market that day was a handsome double-woven serape from Teotitlan del Valle, the most ancient Zapotec capital—a serape that was to be my only bed in the weeks to come.

The Oaxaca market was full of fine sombreros; for sombrero making is the chief industry of the state, 65 per cent of the



Mixtec population of 220,000 being engaged in it. Oaxaca sombreros find a market even outside of Mexico.

The sombreros are made by hand in the homes of the Indians. Every member of the family, from children of six or seven to aged grandparents, makes sombreros, since the head of the family alone, by working from twelve to fourteen hours a day, can make at best three sombreros worth at wholesale only five centavos each. And fifteen centavos a day will not support a family of five persons. Were it not for owning his hut and corn patch the Indian could not live by his own industry. Even though he depends on his own feet to take him to the nearest market, he is obliged to sell to a middleman at the middleman's price, receiving five centavos for a sombrero which will retail for a peso. Thus it is that the middleman gets rich while the Indian remains forever an industrious starveling.

No section of a Mexican market is quite so fascinating as the herb stand—the Indian's drug store. The age of a city or country may be measured by the number of herb doctors that remain. It is an office of the past, primitive, persistent, like the roll of a river or the migration of birds.

In Oaxaca ancient cries still ring in the street: "Medicine for coughs, medicine for toothaches, medicine for the liver! Medicine!" In the herbalist's kit there are even medicines for love and hate and sadness.

One sees lovely roses of Castile offered for sale, and hears the herbalist say to the purchaser:

"Shall I wrap them up, or will you drink them here?"

Herb doctors, like other practitioners, know that nobody likes to pay a doctor's bill. To a customer who offered to pay *mañana*, I overheard an herbalist say:

"Money goes and comes, but not credit."

Due to improper diet, there is a great deal of sickness in Mexico. Skin diseases are common. A high percentage of the people are pock-marked. Infections of all sorts are rife. And the mass of people go to the herb doctor, who offers such remedies as:

Sea frogs to dissolve internal tumors; a mixture of valeriana and the flower called "*de siete azabares*" for attacks of epilepsy; a soup made from the root of the maguey for rabies; a tea of the *tlacopaque* herb for facial paralysis; the root of the *chichicaste*, finely ground, for gonorrhea.

The herbalist's remedies continue to have a touch of mystery, of witchcraft. Digestive ailments, rheumatism, headaches, swollen glands, sores, and "nerves" are ascribed to the evil eye, witchcraft, and above all to "*aire*" (miasma). Asafetida is supposed to be a cure for "*aire*." In some places an infusion of *anisado* and tamarind leaves is spurted on the arm of the patient and massaged. Still another remedy is powdered leaves of the poisonous "*mala mujer*" mixed with grease and rubbed on the patient, who is then put in a *temascal*, or sweat bath. In Cuilapam "*aire*" is ascribed to an evil spirit called the Chaneca which must be exorcised by a witch.

Children who are backward in learning to talk are rubbed with rabbit grease. Coyote grease is said to be good for bodily pains.

The herbalist offers love charms and spite charms. Barren women are given an infusion of *rosa de fandango* (a variety of mint) to induce pregnancy. Expectant Indian mothers rarely have any idea when their babies will arrive, and make no preparation for their coming. The handy machete is used to cut the umbilical cord five inches long. It is tied with a thread drawn from the *reboso* and seared with a candle or pine torch until the knot is reached, to prevent infection. After giving birth, the mother is placed in a sweat bath.

With a dependence on such medical treatment it is not to be wondered at that the survival of the Indians is due almost solely to a high birth rate.

My quest for distinctive costumes proved, after all, not entirely fruitless. Once I saw two *charros*—those gorgeously dressed Mexican cowboys—with their silver braided sombreros, jackets, and leg-molding pants and gaudy serapes. Another

time I came upon a group of shy Huauteecas dressed in long heavily embroidered *huipiles* with ruffled sleeves, more Chinese-looking than Indian. Again I caught a glimpse of a woman from Tehuantepec in a short red *huipil* and full skirt with ruffled hem. Then, toward evening, I suddenly met five women who seemed to have walked right out of the past, before the Spaniards came.

They wore long white cotton *huipiles* such as was worn by Doña Marina, the mistress of Cortes, without whom the Spanish arms could not have succeeded, for it was she who managed the Trojan horse tactics that enabled the Spaniards to establish themselves in Tenochtitlán and make a prisoner of Montezuma. The only decoration was a braid of colored yarn with long tassels at the base of the low V neck. Their hair was coiled with black yarn until it formed a huge dark halo about their head.

As I fumbled for my notebook the women took alarm and ran away. A serape vendor who had been watching, grinned.

"Where are those women from?" I asked.

"From the sierra," he said. "From Yalalag."

Yalalag! Then I would meet them again in their own village.

The finest church in Oaxaca (Oaxacans modestly claim it is the finest in America) is the church of Santo Domingo.

Begun in 1550, its architect was Fray Antonio de Barbosa, a Portuguese lay brother, whose genius also created the never finished marvel of Cuilapam (described in the next chapter). He died in 1608, the year Santo Domingo was dedicated.

The interior of Santo Domingo is so ornate in its baroque decoration that the thought of attempting a description appalls me. I will therefore mention only a detail and let the reader's imagination enlarge upon it.

Upon entering the church the first feature to catch the eye—or rather to hit one between the eyes—is the domed vaulting below the organ loft. From the recumbent figure of a man springs a sort of genealogical tree which spreads over the entire

ceiling and bears the portrait busts in relief of all the persons identified with the early history and later development of the Dominican order. At the very top of the tree appears the figure of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of special devotion.

An inscription in Spanish near the entrance tells how the church was saved from neglect and decay:

"This sanctuary," it reads, "which is considered one of the most notable in America, was erected by the Dominican Fathers who finished their work early in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century the high altar was destroyed and the church closed for forty years, during which time it suffered lamentable deterioration. The illustrious and most reverend Archbishop Dr. D. Eulogio G. Gillow, with the help of the people of Oaxaca, repaired and redecorated it and on November 2, 1902, consecrated it to the honor and glory of Christ the Redeemer."

The adjoining monastery whose immensely thick walls still stand like solid rock is now partly used as a cavalry barracks, and on the wall of one of the great vaulted rooms, where should be a painting of the Virgin, is an analytical drawing of a horse. The ancient patios are filled with rubble and weeds and the stench of human excrement, while the walls of the magnificent staircase are given over to the sort of pornographic art inspired by water-closet walls the world over.

Another notable sixteenth century church is that of La Soledad. Its beauty is much quieter than that of Santo Domingo, as is proper for a church dedicated to Our Lady of Solitude. This virgin is considered one of the richest in America. Her crown (now carefully hidden) contains four and a half pounds of solid gold and blazes with six hundred diamonds. Her gala dress is embroidered with real pearls.



### XIII: CURIOUS CUILAPAM

THE long-nosed god of Rain had spoiled many afternoons of outdoor sketching, and this morning as I drove to the monastic masterpiece of Cuilapam it looked as though he were going to make more trouble for me. Clouds as black as thunder darkened the earth, and the only hope of sunshine was a gleam of silver in the east.

Before long my taxi seemed to be stymied by a mud hole in which one car had already foundered. While my chauffeur was looking over the ground a second car tried to get through and bogged down. I was quite willing to turn back, but Mexican chauffeurs know their mud, and mine proved a good mudder. He plunged his car into the slough of slime and came out on the other side.

We passed the shrine built upon the spot where Fray Juan Diaz led the first mass sung by the Spaniards on entering the valley, and soon came to Xoxocotlán, or Xoxo (Hoho) as it is commonly called, built centuries ago by the Mixtecs from a plan of Monte Alban which is still in the village archives. From

here the road became sketchier and sketchier as we crossed the stony hills.

Suddenly the medieval towers of Cuilapam appeared upon a distant hill. As we approached it we passed the residence of the representatives of Cortes, to whom Charles V of Spain gave virtually the entire present state of Oaxaca with the title of Marquis of the Valley. Cortes wanted Oaxaca for himself when he learned that it was the source of the most of Montezuma's gold, but he never occupied his marquisate. The building is small and without any distinguishing features except for a little Moorish window and the Cortes coat of arms, which is a fine example of sixteenth-century carving.

Cuilapam (Painted River) remains unknown to most visitors to Oaxaca, although it is well worth the time and trouble of going to see. This romantic-looking pile, built by unskilled Indian labor under the supervision of Dominican friars who were not architects is a marvel of architectural beauty with its many courts, graceful arches, Etruscan towers, and immense church dome. During the years of its building a double file of Indians jogged back and forth over the hills to Monte Alban, seven miles away, to fetch the dressed stones of pink and green *cantera*. A Mixtecan glyph set in one of the walls is said to represent the date 1555. But before the magnificent plans were completely realized, Cortes, always jealous of rival power, ordered the Dominicans to abandon their work.

I wandered in delight for more than an hour through the medieval maze of corridors, cells, chapels, and towers, sometimes squeezing through narrow stairways inside the great walls. In the church, which is still intact and in use, are the graves of the Mixtecan prince Nuhucano and the Zapotecan princess Donaji who, despite the traditional enmity of their respective races, were lovers. The stones, which are placed side by side, bear their Christian names of Diego Aguilar and Juana Cortes with which they were baptized into the church.

In order to have both hands free to take notes I had left my hat on. The caretaker asked me to remove it.

"Christ is looking," he said, pointing to the figure on the altar.

We climbed to the square campanile where the old cracked bells still call the people to mass with their quavering ghostly voices, and then passed through many dark rooms with vaulted ceilings where bats hung like large flakes of soot and paintings could still be traced beneath the centuries of grime. We saw the curious sanitary arrangements; the ancient aqueduct; the baptismal font with its fine stone work; the kitchen where the custodian's wife and daughter were on their knees grinding coffee on stone mortars for the agricultural school which occupies a rehabilitated part of the monastery; and the little cell where the Mexican patriot Vicente Guerrero was confined for three days before he was shot by a firing squad on February 14, 1831. Through the deep barred window can be seen the monument in the courtyard erected to his memory.

We went to see a great unfinished hall where beautiful columns lay in fragments and two tall round towers with extinguisher tops stood stanchly, one still displaying a curious weather vane. On one of the walls was a fresco in a lunette—a charming piece of primitive decoration marvelously preserved although exposed to every destructive element—which depicts the baptism of Cosijoeza, the last Zapotecan king.

Finally I climbed to the top of the mighty dome, from which giddy perch I could look down upon the honeycomb of roofless rooms and out over the valley for immense distances. The sky had cleared as if by magic, and the sun flashed like a jewel set in blue enamel.

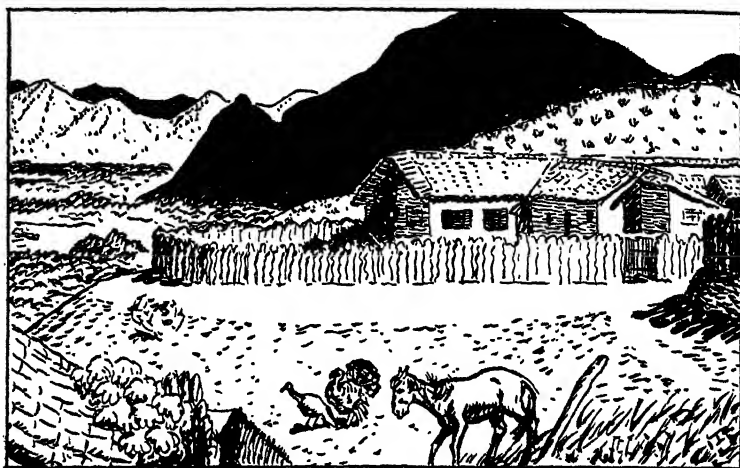
Hidden except for its thatched roofs, the village of Cuilapam nestled among its ancient pecan trees. The inhabitants are all pure-blooded Mixtecs whose ancestors settled in the valley in the fourteenth century. Because the groves have supplied the

region with big luscious pecans since time out of mind, the nuts are known everywhere in Oaxaca as *cuilapams*.

The Mixtecs belong to the culture of the Central Plateau of Mexico, as the Zapotecs belong to that of the Mayan isthmus. It is supposed that the former invaded Oaxaca long after the latter had been settled there. Traditional enemies, they have only been reconciled when called upon to face a common foe. Bloody feuds still exist between Mixtec and Zapotec villages.

Off to the west I saw a strange hill which is known because of its form as the Breast of María Sanchez. I did not dream that in a few days I would be staying at a mine in the mountains beyond and learning about gold from a man called the Chivo.





## XIV: GOLD

COME to see us at the mine.” When I heard these words I hardly believed them, for in these days of confiscation of private property hospitality is almost extinct in Mexico. But they were truly meant, and the person who spoke them was Mrs. William S. Gattrell, formerly Dr. Rosetta Cootner of New York, whom I met on the evening of my return from Cuilapam at the Hotel Monte Alban.

The invitation was irresistible. Gold was the undoing of ancient Mexico, for it was chiefly the tribute of golden ornaments paid by the Zapotecs and Mixtecs to the Aztec emperors that had filled Cortes’ eyes with greed. And the richest gold-producing region was that beyond the Breast of María Sanchez, where the Gattrells’ mine was located.

So one morning a few days later Narizona and I were jouncing over the road to the mine in the taxi of one Monterubio.

Narizona (Long Nose) was the baby *coati mundi* of which I had become so fond in the Oaxaca market. I had bought her to take as a gift to the Gattrells. Mrs. Gattrell had told me they had no pets. But that this might mean that they didn’t like

them never occurred to me; nor did I stop to think that a coati mundi was a rather bizarre gift. I had become attached to Narizona from playing with her almost daily in the market, and I wanted to save her from the stew pot, enjoy her for a while, and leave her with friends.

Perhaps she was further endeared to me because a little Indian boy loved her so much that he hugged her to his bosom and cried hysterically when I went to get her. Just before leaving New York I had finished writing *The Cedar Deer*,\* the story of an Indian boy and his pet coati mundi which he stanchly refused to sell to a stranger. The scene in the market was like my own illustration come to life.

"Let the boy keep her," I told the father.

But, promising his son another, he gently took the little animal from the boy's convulsed grasp. I knew that for the boy there could never be another Narizona, and I felt infinitely mean as I followed the father and the coati mundi away to conclude the purchase out of sight.

With Narizona clinging around my neck like a collar of the softest fur, however, I salved my conscience with the thought that if I had not bought her someone else might have done so just to kill and eat her.

I told Monterubio, the chauffeur, about the scene in the market and the similar scene in my book, adding that in the story the coati mundi was the Indian boy's *nabual*. He looked at me in amazement and then laughed heartily at my knowing about *nabuals*.

A *nabual*, according to Indian belief, is a person's spiritual double in the animal world. This beast or bird remains through life that individual's best friend, the half of his being, another self, something closer and more watchful than a guardian angel. Whatever fortune befalls either will be mutually shared. If the wild beast is wounded by a hunter, similar wounds will appear on the corresponding parts of the child or man without any

\* Coward-McCann, New York. \$2.00.

apparent cause. On the other hand, if the latter is hurt or killed the same fate will befall his *nabual*.

Zapotec parents spread ashes on a new born babe's sleeping mat at night and examine them for footprints in the morning as a method of determining the infant's *nabual*.

Before long we passed Indian laborers working on the road, and Monterubio took a sheaf of leaflets from a cache under his folded sun visor and tossed them out the window. They were eagerly gathered up by the workmen. I was surprised to find that they were evangelical tracts, originating in England but printed in Spanish. Under the title "The Good News," were pictures of disasters in English mines and sick room scenes in Scotland. The text may be imagined. It always ended with a moral from the Bible, such as "You cannot serve God and Mammon."

"Can these men read?" I asked.

"Yes," nodded my evangelical chauffeur. "And they need good things to read, because they are very bad. They will kill a man for five pesos."

In spite of being religious to the point of fanaticism, Monterubio had a mistress as well as a wife. When his wife learned of his extramarital relations, she was very angry and accused him of not being a good Christian. Troubled in his conscience, Monterubio went to the priest and, after confession, asked whether as a Christian he should give up one of his women—and which one? The priest replied: "Go, and be thankful there are two women in this world who love you!"

The road became dangerously bad and in one place, impassable. Monterubio was obliged to get out and fill up a ditch with a shovel he carried in the car and drive across a field until he got beyond the worst of it.

At Ocotlán, where we stopped for breakfast, I saw Indians in the market place kissing hands. The young people would put their lips to the hands of their older kinspeople and say "Chan."

Often the ceremony was a mere gesture, a quick jack-knife jerk from the hips.

Hand kissing is said to have originated with the coming of the Spanish priests who demanded that the Indians kiss their hands as a mark of respect. But in ancient carvings one sees kneeling figures kissing the garments of the high priest, which suggests the possibility that hands may have been kissed as well.

From Ocotlán the road hardly deserved the name. There were five rivers to ford. In one of them I saw a white heron which was standing on one leg and did not even blink its red eye when we splashed by within twenty paces of it. Another time, I saw a king *sopilote* or *quebrantabueso* (bone-breaker), as it is popularly known. Unlike the evil-looking black vulture over which it is lord, it is a royal bird, like the eagle. If a king *sopilote* is present when a flock of black vultures discovers a carcass the vassal birds will wait until their lord has devoured the choicest morsels. This bird is white with black wings and tail and touches of red about the head and throat.

We passed only one habitation on the way—a once beautiful hacienda, whose spacious *casa grande* and chapel bespoke a gracious and generous life that has almost faded from the Mexican scene. Now all was ruined and defiled.

This hacienda, like so many others, had been seized and "re-partitioned" among the peons. Instead of being an employee, each man owns a little farm of four or six acres called an *ejido*. It does not give him a living, and he is in debt to the *ejidal* bank as he was formerly to the hacienda, with the difference that he is worse off, has fewer—if any—benefits, and (left to himself) raises a poorer crop.

A part of the *casa grande* was occupied by a Spanish family who were profitably recovering gold from the tailings dump of an old mine by means of the cyanide process, which was unknown to the wasteful early miners.

The mountains in this region have been denuded of trees to supply brazier and furnace, for Mexico mines no coal. Around

all towns and cities and mines the forests have gone into the making of charcoal—Mexico's chief fuel—and this frightful waste is annually making Mexico more and more of a desert. Erosion, like a camp follower, is completing the work of this war on trees by carrying off the top soil and making the land stony and sterile.

Mexico, primarily an agricultural land, was buying its four prime necessities—corn, sugar, rice and wheat—outside the country.

We were in hailing distance of the Gattrells' house before we saw it, as it is built on a knoll in a *barranca*. The tiled villa was set in a garden and barricaded by a circular fence of organ cactus.

"Howdy, stranger," said my host, with a Western twang.

Middle-aged, tall, and wiry with a weather-roughened skin and dressed in a double-decker miner's helmet, painted red, heavy service automatic in a shoulder holster, and clumsy hob-nailed boots, he was a picturesque figure.

"What's that varmint on your shoulder?" he grinned.

"Just a little gift," I said.

"Oh, Rose!" he called. "Here's our guest, and he's brought us a dog-goned varmint."

Rose came running with a look half of amusement and half of consternation. (Later I learned that they were allergic to pets of all kinds.)

"What a perfectly fascinating nose!" Rose exclaimed when she saw Narizona. "Oh, it's cute, Will! But what kind of an animal is it?"

I said it was a *coati mundi*, but that the natives called it variously a *tejón*, a *mapache*, and a *cacamixtle*.

"It's just a varmint," said my host.

We passed through the gate in the cactus fence and paused to admire the garden, of which the owners were justly proud, as it was the only one within a radius of twenty miles. Every blade of

grass was a miracle in that region and every new rosebud was hailed as an exciting and blessed event.

"It must be a satisfaction," I remarked, "not to be pestered by neighbors asking to borrow the lawn mower."

"When it comes to that," said my host, "it'll be time to move on."

The blazing sun drove us to the shelter of the cool corridor made by the slanting tile roof, and while Rose went to tell the Indian maid Ofelia to prepare *frescos* (soft drinks) I sat on the porch with my host. Geologist, oil driller, gold prospector, and soldier of fortune, he has led a wild life in Mexico and carries a price on his head (for taking part in revolutions) in certain states. Among old timers he is known as the Chivo (Goat). He has made and lost several fortunes.

"Pancho Villa gave me the name when I was a general in his army," he told me. "Yes, sir, I was a general and make no mistake. I had a machine gun and two American Negroes, and they were worth a regiment. I used to make them hold their fire when those Yaquis came after us on bulls waving their no-good rifles and machetes. When they were almost on top of us I'd let 'em have it. We sure did a lot of damage. I used to have a goatee in those days. That's why Villa called me the Chivo. When my old Irish maw heard I had been a general in Villa's army she called me right up long distance all the way from the States and gave me the worst bawling out you ever heard."

Rose came back with Ofelia carrying a tray of lemonades made with cool spring water that needed no icing. Narizona was running about poking her long slender nose into every corner of her new home.

"How do you like the new member of the family, Ofelia?" asked Rose.

"Ask her that after the varmint has run up her leg once," said the Chivo.

When we went up the hill to see the mine Narizona ran at our heels like a puppy, when she wasn't dashing off after grass-

hoppers. The Chivo wouldn't let Rose go down into the mine with us because of the superstition that it is unlucky for a woman to enter a mine.

"If I let Rose come down the men would quit quicker'n you could scratch your behind," he said.

He showed me how a shaft is timbered and how the miners follow the vein. (That inexperienced miners can lose a vein, he demonstrated later by taking me into an abandoned mine where a fortune had been squandered tunneling fruitlessly for eleven hundred feet.)

"You have to follow the vein *down*," he said. "But unless the shaft is properly timbered cave-ins occur, men are killed, and the working has to be given up."

After a brief lesson in geology we clambered out and watched two men bring up bucket loads of ore by means of a wooden whim. This ore was all thrown away.

"How do you know they aren't throwing away gold?" I asked.

"They are," said the Chivo. "But the ore isn't rich enough to be worth recovering."

The foreman handed him some specimen ore which he examined through a magnifying glass.

"This looks pretty good," he said. "Let's take it home and see what's in it."

Back at the house, they showed me a big bin stacked with broken rock.

"This is our bank," said Rose.

This was pay dirt—gold—but to me it looked like common dirt.

"I'll have to see it glitter before I'll believe it's gold," I said.

"All right," said the Chivo, "you shall see it glitter."

He put a piece of ore on a tilted iron shelf called a bucking board and ground it into a fine brown dust with a heavy sledgelike tool. Then he strained the dust through an eighty-mesh sieve.

"Come with me to the spring and I'll show you how to make a *tentadura*," he said. "In case you don't know, a *tentadura* is a crude assay made by panning."

While he washed the ore in a white enamel basin to get rid of the fine particles of quartz and produce a saturated pulp, Narizona crawled all over him, but he didn't seem to mind. Transferring the pulp to a deep glazed earthenware dish called a *varcelona*, he continued to wash away the quartz until only a small deposit of black iron ore could be seen along the rim. This was a ticklish operation and I could not see why some of the gold would not be washed away along with the quartz.

"Gold is hard to throw away," he said. "It is one of the laziest of metals. It goes to the bottom and likes to stay there."

Now he stood up and gently rocked the *varcelona* until a fine tail of yellow gold appeared beyond the black ore. There were a few pieces of coarse gold which he counted with a lens.

"It will run about thirty grams to the ton," he said. "That's darn good. Forty-five grams per ton is bonanza ore."

"What do you do with the gold from the *tentaduras*," I asked.

"We are saving it to have it made into a wedding ring," Rose said. "I think it would be romantic to have a ring made of the gold from our own mine. Once we had enough, after saving the *tentaduras* for a whole year, but the morning we were going to take it to Oaxaca, Will accidentally threw it down the water-closet."

"If a *tentadura* shows all the gold in a sample of ore, why do you call it a crude assay?" I asked the Chivo.

"It doesn't show all the gold," he replied. "Gold exists in four different forms—tellurides, chlorides, sulphides, and native gold. Native gold only will show in *tentaduras*."

"Then the early American Indians only found native gold?"

"Yes. They didn't dig for it. They merely panned the streams where gold particles were found."

While we were having cocktails on the porch before dinner



Narizona, with her endless curiosity, found a few drops of spilled liquor and lapped them up with evident relish.

"So you like cocktails!" said the Chivo, and poured a good hooker into a saucer.

Narizona tossed it off like an old toper. Then she looked at us in utter amazement. Why were we going round and round? She took a few steps. What made the floor so unsteady? She tried to stand up and reeled over backwards. "Who pushed me?" she demanded, looking at each of us in turn.

"Oh, the poor little thing," Rose cried.

"Let her alone. She's having her first fling," said the Chivo.

Narizona tried to figure the thing out. The floor was whirling dizzily where she was, but maybe over there it would be quiet. Suddenly she made a dash for it, skidded into a loop and rolled over and over. She got up, shook herself, recovered her dignity, and scratched behind her ears with her front paws. "There's something screwy in all this," she told herself. Slowly she wobbled back to the fateful saucer, sniffed it and then, abandoning all caution, lapped up the remaining drops.

Whoo!

A tiny cyclone of fur whirled up the porch swing, along the back, and out to the end of one of the arms. There it stopped and became Narizona. She looked down, teetering groggily. The floor was tilting up toward her and she put out a paw to push it back, lost her balance and fell. Being a cat she landed on her feet, but she was badly shaken. There wasn't any place she could go where she wasn't pushed around. She began to feel very sorry for herself.

The Chivo picked her up and put her inside his shirt. At last it was warm and dark. She curled up cozily against his heart and went to sleep. The pet-hater smiled tenderly.

"Will has never liked animals around the house," Rose confessed. "Narizona is the first pet he has taken to."

"I won't have any animals around that bring fleas," said the

Chivo. "Dogs yap all night at the moon and hide when strangers come around. Turkeys are much better watchdogs."

We turned in right after dinner, as the day began at dawn. I shall never forget how strangely still it seemed that first night, bedded away from the world in those lonely mountains where the only sound was the baying of a coyote.

I thought of the bloody history of gold—gold which comes from the festering wounds of the earth and for which men have committed every conceivable sin. Gold—which men seek in far places in order to gain power in crowded cities. Gold—which makes those who have it and those who do not alike fearful of the future.

I went to sleep and dreamed that the Chivo and I were wandering like sleuths, with our spitting miner's lanterns, in the bowels of the earth. "I am a detective," he said, "trying to find out what has happened. God always leaves a footprint, but we seldom find it until long afterward." His voice echoed in the caves with garbled sepulchral rumblings which grew louder, louder, louder . . . garble . . . gorbble . . . gobble!

Suddenly I realized I was awake and that the Chivo's watchdogs—the turkeys—were making a frightful clamor: Gobble, gobble, gobble.

I expected to hear the Chivo get up—to hear the bark of his automatic. But no sound came from his room.

Gobble, gobble, gobble! The note was urgent, imperative, frantic. I was about to jump out of bed and raise a cry when a hen's raucous squawk was cut short in the middle. Too late! I sank back on my pillow. The feathered watchdogs grew quiet. Silence again enfolded the hills.

In the morning Ofelia said a hen had been stolen by a coyote.

Although I had written Vicho to meet me in Oaxaca on Monday, I lingered at the mine until Thursday. It was not easy to leave the pleasant company of the Gattrells. Nor was it easy to leave such an isolated spot. They had but one horse and no

men to spare and the weather was always uncertain. But when the Ramsdens, who lived at the hacienda fifteen miles away, sent a note that they were going into Oaxaca in their car, it was decided that I should go with them.

The day before I left, the mine went into bonanza.

The Chivo seemed to take it very calmly, almost grimly. "The Almighty put the gold there a million years ago, and it won't change overnight," he said. "Hell begins with a bonanza. The men have been good workmen so far, but now they will start stealing. They are always in cahoots. Anyone who holds out gets knifed. And if you don't stop the stealing in the beginning, you're licked."

"How do the men get away with the gold?" I asked.

"One of their tricks is to wipe their hands on their hair. When they get home they wash their hair in a basin and pan the dirt. They can make a neat haul that way. Another trick is to mix the gold with chewing gum and swallow it. From now on my men will have to shave their heads and stop chewing gum. I will make them change their clothes when they leave the mine and take a shower bath. And while they are naked I will make them pass through a low door and step over a high sill. When they stoop and raise their leg at the same time, anything concealed in the rectum is bound to come out. I have seen many a man lay a golden egg and look around as surprised as a goose!"

I then asked him if he weren't afraid of the Mexican government's confiscating the property after he had installed machinery and put it on a paying basis.

"I own the concession on this denouncement so long as I conform to Mexican law," he said. "But I do not own the mine. If the government sees fit to cancel my concession to operate the mine, the mining property naturally reverts to federal ownership, and I have no recourse whatsoever. That is *not* expropriation. But if they should seize my mill and pay for it that is expropriation. Seizure of property without due notice and without placing the matter of a fair reimbursement before a properly

appointed board of arbitration is *confiscation*. That is what happened in the case of the oil companies."

Prospecting, I saw, was exciting, but actual mining might be burdensome. I had heard that in Guanajuato there was a union of mine thieves and that the mayor was president of the union. And now, after listening to the difficulties which would follow the discovery of the *bonanza*, I was perplexed whether I should congratulate or sympathize with the Chivo.



## XV: ITINERARY FOR A WILD GOOSE CHASE

BACK once more in Oaxaca and rarín' to start over the mountains to Yalalag and Tehuantepec, I was more than glad to see Vicho, who had come down from Mexico City to join me. He appeared equally glad to see me, for he had been waiting three days for my return. He was still dressed in city clothes and appeared even paler and thinner than I remembered him. Again doubts crossed my mind as to his ability to stand the hardships that were certain to lie ahead of us. But when we had changed into rough clothes he seemed different. A certain quietness and restraint that I had taken for shyness seemed to have been sloughed off with street dress, as if it had covered his true personality. As we took stock of our equipment, sorting out what we would need and what we could leave behind to lighten the load, he became talkative and gay, like one who is about to return to the life he loves.

We finally got our essentials down to two *mangas* or large rubber squares with a head hole in the middle, two blankets, windbreakers, a change of clothes, and my painting equipment,

and by neat packing got these things into one large bundle and two zipper bags, weighing in all about eighty pounds. Vicho scorned as effete such small comforts as a cot, mattress, or pillow. He said we could always make a bed of dry corn shucks. By way of tools and weapons we had a long-bladed hunting knife, a machete, and a .22 caliber revolver loaned to Vicho by his father, to whom it had been given when he was a police reporter in the States. It had belonged to a notorious gun moll. Its use to us, however, was somewhat limited by the fact that, not having a license to carry it, Vicho had been unable to buy any bullets.

While waiting for me in Oaxaca, Vicho had been looking at horses. He wanted me to buy a pack horse and two saddle horses. Good horses, he said, were always in demand, and we could easily sell them in Tehuantepec, perhaps at a profit. But having been assured that we could always get horses from village to village by no less a person than the governor, who gave me a letter to the local authorities asking them to provide me with strong animals and a guide, I thought the outlay and risk superfluous.

But I did not yet know that it is better to play safe than to trust even the highest official aid. All Mexicans are so polite and eager to please that, rather than disappoint you by saying they do not know, they will send you on the wildest of wild goose chases.

The governor kindly sent for a man who knew the Yalalag Sierra and, in order that his directions should be clearly understood, had a stenographer type them in English. This itinerary proved to be, not only the longest possible route to Yalalag, but one utterly impossible to follow in the rainy season.

Vicho, who at the last minute set out to find someone in Oaxaca who had a .22 pistol and would part with a clip of cartridges, missed the bus, but overtook it on the run before it had gone two blocks.

The country through which we were going was said to be in-

fested with bandits. We were told that the Indians back in the hills were very bad and that they hated the whites and considered it a great honor to have killed a white man.

But the natural perils were even greater. And against disease, poisonous insects, and reptiles we took almost no precautions. Vicho had omitted to buy mosquito netting, and I had only a small bottle of quinine in case either of us got malaria. We had not had typhoid injections. We took no food and only two small canteens and a canvas water bottle. As Vicho was shortly deprived of his gun, and I lost my canteen, we were soon in the position of having to throw ourselves upon the hospitality of an inhospitable country. And we suffered for it.

Over the ruts and chuck holes of the Inter-American Highway we bumped springlessly on the way to Tlacolula. Our bus, which was named Tarzan, was really a truck equipped with wooden side benches for passengers. The Mexicans with acid humor call these buses pullmans. The whole center part was piled high with baskets and bundles and sour-smelling kegs of mescal until there was hardly leg room for ourselves and our Indian passengers.

The Indians were very exclusive at first and spoke only among themselves in their native Zapotec. There were five men and eight women. The men wore the usual soiled white blouse and pants, big sombrero, black-gray-and-white serape over one shoulder, and woven-topped open-toed leather shoes called *buaraches*; and the women covered their heads with black *rebosos*, the ends of which were crossed over their full bosoms and wrapped around their ample waists. They were barefoot and their blouses and skirts were of colored cotton, the latter very full and of some cheap print. Their faces and hands were bronzed and wrinkled from exposure. Their eyes were beady, reptilian.

These were the people among whom we were going to live. I studied them with interest and wondered if they were talking about us in that strange, clipped idiom of theirs. It would be well to learn a few words, and we decided to start right then.

Across from me sat a couple who might have been thirty-five years of age or a hundred. The woman had a basket in her lap filled with long green pods, and I asked her what they were called in Spanish.

"Are *oaxes*," she said, her face breaking into a smile that turned it from cold to warm.

Everybody in the bus smiled because the gringo spoke Spanish and was interested in *oaxes*.

"Are they good to eat?" I asked.

"How not? Try one," she answered, offering me a pod.

I was curious to do so, as this was the fruit of the *oaxe* tree for which Oaxaca was named. So I broke the pod open, and Vicho and I both sampled some of the seeds, which we found very bitter. Everyone laughed at the wry faces we made. They said they were very good, especially when eaten with chili and *tortillas*.

The ice had been broken, and when we started in on our word list they were all helpful and as amused as if it were a game.

We found it very difficult, even after many repetitions, to spell some of the words in phonetic English, because there were certain sounds that corresponded only to a sigh or a grunt. Things introduced since the conquest are called by their Spanish names, as *café* (coffee) and *leche* (milk), but often they were shortened or softened, as *tiend'* for *tienda* (shop) and *ti're* for *tigre* (tiger). There are no harsh sounds in Zapotec. The *g* in Yalalag is never sounded by the Indians, who always say Yalala' — a far prettier pronunciation.

By the time we reached Tlacolula we had learned enough words to order a meal and secure lodging for the night, but in the mountains, we were to find, they did not understand our valley Zapotec!

While I guarded our luggage, Vicho went to look for a room, but after an hour's search came back with the news that the choice lay between a filthy *meson* (a combination stable and



inn) with two beds, and a fairly clean hotel with only one. He said he would rather sleep on the floor of the latter. I was shocked at the idea of his sleeping on the floor, not realizing that beginning with the morrow I would look upon a clean floor as a kingly couch.

Having deposited our things in the hotel room, a big dark cell entirely unfurnished except for a single cot, we went to see the man whom the governor's letter requested to supply us with strong animals and a guide. He turned out to be the proprietor of the *meson*. He was an old man with blanché stiff hair and sagging flesh and sagging soiled *calzones*. Putting on a pair of glasses, he read our letter carefully, but without being impressed.

He led us down a long *zaguán* lined with dusty old carriages to a little patio filled with the odors of grease and manure from the open kitchen *poyo* and the corral. His wife was sitting on the floor nursing a brown brat dressed only in a dirty navel-reaching shirt. The eyes of both woman and child were half-closed by some disorder causing a discharge which attracted flies.

Vicho took one look at the animals—three sorry horses and a mule—in the muddy corral, and said we had better look elsewhere. The old man shrugged, and said:

"As you wish, *señores*. But you will find no better horses than mine."

We wasted an hour finding out that he was right, and for the very simple reason that he was the only man in town who had any horses.

We found him waiting patiently for us to come back. But it turned out that two of the horses had just come in from a trip and were too tired to start out with us in the morning. That left only the mule and a small horse with a lame foreleg. And the old man didn't seem to care about letting us have either.

While we were discussing the matter, the man's son, a slight,

gypsy-faced young *ladino*, came in. Our letters had more effect on him, for he said that if the lame horse were shod it would do, and that if we would pay the entire trip in advance he knew where he could buy another horse. We came to an agreement on this basis, although the father wanted an equal sum as a deposit in case any of the animals were injured or killed. The trails were very bad and in dangerous condition on account of the rains, he argued. But the son finally persuaded him that the governor's letter showed that we were responsible. Besides, he could send a boy along with us.

Vicho wanted the horse and mule led out into the stable yard where he could examine them. The old man went into the corral and brought out the horse, but the son was afraid to go near the mule and tried to lasso it from a distance. The mule ducked the rope and ran in among the horses, which lashed out at it with their hoofs and bit it on the neck. Soon the corral was in an uproar. Mud and heels flew in every direction, and all the son did was to dodge them. This kept up until Vicho lost patience and went in and caught the mule by the halter.

On looking it over in the open, he found that its ears were full of big ticks, but when he tried to remove them the animal reared and struck at him with its fore feet. Vicho held his ground and struck back with the halter rope. And when the mule quieted down, he rubbed its forehead and fed it the tobacco from two cigarettes. Apparently mules, like Mexicans, become friendly over cigarettes, for after that it let him pick the ticks out of its ears and examine its hoofs and pack sores.

The old man's son looked on in disgust at this winning of an ornery mule. Mexicans generally are cruel to animals. Perhaps that is why they like the bull ring.

Leaving with the understanding that we would come for the animals at five the next morning, we went for a walk to kill time until dinner. We saw a score of ragged youngsters playing in the street. One had a pointed stick with which he chased the others, who tried to lasso him with ropes or else get out of his

way without being pricked. They told us that the boy with the stick was the *torito* (little bull). Finally he was caught and dragged yelling in the dust. Then it was another boy's turn to be the *torito*.

We followed the cactus-fenced street to the edge of town and continued on into the open country for a mile or more until we came to a hacienda, boarded up and battered, beside a little river, which had been dammed to provide waterpower. But the water no longer turned any wheels. The power plant was rusting. The walls of the buildings were peppered with holes like those bullets would make, suggesting that the owners had not given up their property without resistance. A peon was driving cattle through the fields which once waved with the succulent green stalks of sugar cane.

Revolution, looting, and waste. Can the co-operation of small farmers provide the capital necessary to rehabilitate rural Mexico?

By the time we started back, darkness was filling the valley like a flood. We watched it rise in a blue tide up the slopes of the eastern mountains, extinguishing the ruddy glow of the setting sun. Before we reached town we were stumbling along in a perfect black-out.

The only light in the street came from the doorways of the shops, lit by glaring gasoline lamps. People came startingly out of the darkness into the broad white beam, like apparitions.

We went into the general store on the corner of the plaza to buy some liquor to help gain the good will of the *presidentes* of the Indian villages. But when we told the mestizo clerk where we were going he said:

"You couldn't hire me to go to Yalalag. A little while ago there were so many killings there the government had to send the soldiers. No white men live in the place."

But we had been warned of so many dangers that we had grown skeptical, or fatalistic. We were taking our chances with the filaria, or blinding fly, with mosquitoes and snakes, so why

not with the Indians, who at least were amenable to friendly overtures? A friend of Vicho's had warned him to put wax under his fingernails as a precaution against an insect that laid its eggs there with the result that the nits ate away the flesh until the nails dropped off. But disease and danger exist everywhere. Travelers forget the risks they run at home. I knew a Texas cowboy who, while standing at the curb on Fifth Avenue on the day of his arrival in New York, was kicked by a horse. And at the very moment when the clerk was telling us about the unfriendly Indians, a none-too-friendly Mexican came into the store.

I saw at a glance that he was different from the townspeople and that he was looking for trouble. He appeared to be about forty and was above the average height of his race, stockily built and darkish. His clothes—large felt hat, riding breeches, and puttees, all of good quality—marked him as a boss on some outdoor job. His eyes were already bloodshot with drinking, and he leaned unsteadily on the arm of a lithe young *ladino*.

Almost at once he started talking to us in a mixture of Spanish and English, which he told us he had picked up in Chicago. It was not so much what he said as his manner that made us feel that he was leading up to something. What that was we began to suspect upon noting that the Indians and *ladinos* who had been lounging around the store began to leave.

We did not find his company at all enlivening and were ready to leave ourselves. But when I went to pick up the two pint bottles of *habanero* I had bought, I saw that one was missing. The clerk said he was sure that he had put out two.

The young man, without being accused, opened his coat and said, "I didn't take it."

That left only his boss.

"You don't think he would take it," said the young man, as if the act had been rehearsed.

I was now fairly sure that they had come in to provoke a quarrel. I had heard of gringo baiters and at last was face to

face with one. I glanced at Vicho who was standing near the *ladino* youth. They were about evenly matched in size, but having seen Vicho handle a vicious mule I felt sure he could handle a half-breed colt.

The Mexican swore a mighty oath and told the clerk to bring two bottles of *habanero* to replace the missing one.

Then he said he didn't like Chicago nor gringos but that I was his friend.

"Aren't you my fren'?" he said thickly, throwing his arms around me.

I suppose this was a trick to find out if I was carrying a concealed weapon.

"Sure I'm your friend," I told him, releasing myself.

"'Course y' are," he said. And uncorking the *habanero* bottles and throwing the corks away, he pushed one bottle toward me and took up the other.

"*Salud!*" he said.

I made no move.

"Wha's the matter, my fren'," he said frowning. "Aren't you going to drink with me?"

"No, thanks," I said, aware that he would take it as an insult.

As he slowly lowered the bottle, I tried to read his next move. I expected it would come with catlike speed. Would he throw the bottle at me and draw a gun? With sudden surprise I noted that even the store clerks had slipped away. This seemed to mean that they knew their man and expected a shooting. I thought of Vicho's .22, but remembered he had not loaded it.

Well, I told myself, we are in for it.

The hand with the bottle reversed its direction and carried it up to the man's lips. And when he put it down it was two-thirds empty.

Now! I thought.

But whatever I might have been called upon to do, that Gargantuan draught did for me.

Suddenly the fellow's eyes glazed, his knees buckled, and, catching at the counter for support, he slid along it for ten feet, spun around like a top and fell flat on his face.

Vicho and the young *ladino* lifted him up, and the latter helped him out into the night.

Vicho looked disappointed.

"I love a fight," he said.

Later he showed that he meant it. While he looked frail, his body was like tempered steel, and he knew how to use it. Brought up on a Mexican ranch, he had been taught that in handling men as well as mules, an American must always prove his superiority. I did my stubborn best to live up to this ideal too; but I was not brought up on a Mexican ranch, and I often only succeeded in appearing absurd.

.



## XVI: LIFE WITH THE INDIANS

**T**R-R-R-R-R-R-R! With pitiless precision the alarm clock woke us promptly at four o'clock.

Vicho reached toward the snarling sound in the darkness and throttled it. Then he switched on his electric lantern which made an oval of light upon the bare cold walls of our cell-like room. It was a cheerless awakening, but Vicho dispelled the gloom by singing gaily:

"Good morning to you!  
Good morning to you!  
Good morning, dear Addison,  
Good morning to you!"

I joined in laughingly, and every morning thereafter wherever we happened to wake—in Indian *jacal* or under the stars or in a city hotel—we greeted each other with the same cheery song, though doubtless we were often taken for a couple of lunatics.

Earlier that morning I had been awakened by an earthquake which struck like a thunderbolt, almost throwing me out of bed. I had sat on the edge of my cot for a moment, ready to

dash out to the patio as I heard the women and children doing, but the shock was not repeated. Vicho slept through it with a soundness I envied.

When we went for our horses we found that they had not yet been saddled. This was probably just as well, as Vicho would have unsaddled them and done the job over, as he always did every morning, rubbing them down carefully, adjusting the saddle blankets and cinches and cleaning the mud from the animals' hoofs. The natives, unused to seeing mere plugs given such care, always looked on in wonder. This morning, Vicho found it necessary to repair one of the saddles, and with all these chores, it was six-thirty and daylight before we cantered out of Tlacolula. Emilio, our Indian guide, followed with the pack mule.

My horse, which the old man had just bought, was a big strong-looking gray animal about eight years old, for which he had paid forty pesos, or about eight dollars. But Vicho's nag, the lame one, favored its weak foreleg, and Vicho got off several times to examine it, lagging far behind in doing so.

At the edge of town Emilio and I waited for him to catch up with us. We saw Vicho dig his heels into the horse's flanks and come on the gallop, but before covering half the distance the horse stumbled and fell headlong, pitching Vicho from the saddle, although he landed unhurt on his feet.

It was obvious, however, that the horse could never make the trip, and Vicho went back to exchange his mount, saying that he would overtake us.

It was a morning of pure magic. The world seemed tinted with all the hues of a Mexican opal. The air off the mountains was like nectar. The road cut across the flat dry desert, the dust of which had been laid by the dew. Little birds with red heads flitted and chirped in the thorn, while the black vultures stood like obsidian carvings on top of the grooved green columns of organ cactus, whitened with their lime. Once we disturbed them



breakfasting on the carcass of a coyote, and they flew off with a heavy flapping of pinions.

We passed through the village of Santa Ana del Valle, lying flat on the desert and dominated by the twin pink domes of the church. Here the road forked and Emilio took the one we were told was somewhat longer, but less arduous.

Soon we were in the foothills, climbing slowly along a serpentine trail that took us higher and ever higher above the valley until the whole patched plain with its little villages clustering around churches lay spread out below like a map. Hours went by and, though we watched the back trail, we saw no sign of Vicho.

Several times we waited and hallooed, but there was never any answer. I pondered the possibility of his having been unable to get another horse at once or of having been misdirected. But it seemed best to go to the first village on our itinerary—Cuajimoloyas—and wait for him there.

Nature was too beautiful and peaceful for me to feel troubled. I took deep draughts of the crisp air, scented by innumerable exotic wild flowers which bloomed along the trail and painted the hills. Masses of marigolds glowed on every slope, like outcroppings of native gold.

At last, as the country became stony and covered with scented pines, we came to the juncture with the short cut from Santa Ana del Valle, and, while I was debating with myself whether to wait there for Vicho, a voice from the trail high above called:

"Hello, America!"

When we caught up with him, Vicho was lounging on a rock while his mount—a little brown mare, hardly more than a colt—cropped the grass in a small clearing. He said the trail he had taken was so perpendicular that the mare almost fell over backwards. She was already badly done in, and as we went on Vicho was obliged to walk half the time to relieve her of his weight.

From time to time we met Indians coming down the trail, singly or in groups with pack animals laden with oranges for

the market in Tlacolula. We bought some to refresh ourselves and found them as cold from the high altitude as if they had been iced. From these merchants we learned that it would be impossible to reach Yalina, according to the governor's itinerary, by nightfall.

Once we overtook an Indian with a train of burros carrying large dried fish from Tehuantepec to Yalalag via the Cajones—several scattered villages all with the same name. Although we left him behind, our pace was a slow one.

"I wish my mare were three years older, and your horse were three years younger," complained Vicho.

Now we were up in the cold clouds and windy passes. The sun had disappeared. And though we put on our sweaters and wind breakers we still shivered.

At noon we reached Cuajimoloyas, a wind-swept little settlement of low wooden hovels standing in the black mud within log-fenced corrals full of lean pigs and turkeys. In the wintry gloom it seemed the most desolate and depressing sight I have ever chanced upon. But it meant food and rest and we stopped to partake of what scant cheer was offered.

The *fonda*, or eating place, was a jerry-built shanty, dark and windowless, with a bare earth floor, furnished with rough log benches ranged along the walls. A gaunt, unsmiling Indian woman was stirring a bubbling stew in a pot placed on stones over a fire built on the floor. Upon entering, our eyes smarted with the smoke, and the odor of burning pine and boiling fat and chili made us choke.

When our eyes became used to the darkness, we saw that the soot-black room was filled with Indians and flies. The people were all crouching on the damp mud floor like half-created beings. They eyed us unsmilingly, with a moody resistance, and then would have ignored us.

We sat on a log near the door, the cold being preferable to the closeness and gloom. The cook ladled out bowl after bowl of the stew and passed it around to the crouching Indians

with stacks of big *tortillas*, until all was gone. We had to wait until a new stew was made.

The Indians talked among themselves in low whispering Zapotec, paying no attention to us, while they sipped their stew and scooped out pieces of meat and potatoes with pieces of *tortilla*.

Near us sat a group of five women, all of whom had small children. A thin stiff little man sat among them. I spoke to them in Spanish, and the man answered shortly, but the women made no sign of hearing. Then I tried out some of the Zapotec words we had learned on the way to Tlacolula, but got no response. Even my smile went unanswered.

As a rule Indians are as ready to laugh as children.

"Can't you say something to make them laugh," I begged Vicho.

But they only looked at us with a queer void antagonism. The only Indian to laugh was our mule boy Emilio.

The bare feet of the women were scaly with dried mud. From never having been shod, the soles were thick and cracked like the feet of a bear. They reminded me of the story of the American who married an Indian woman and gave her a pair of shoes for a wedding gift. She was so proud of her shoes that she wore them to bed.

"You must learn to take off your shoes at night," her husband told her.

She got up to do as he bade, but when she returned to bed, her husband said:

"I thought I told you to take off your shoes."

"I did, my husband," said the Indian woman.

"Well," he sighed, "maybe you had better put them on again."

I doubted whether this story would have amused the Indians, and anyway it was apparent that their knowledge of Spanish was very limited, which accounted for their masklike smilelessness.

I asked Emilio if he couldn't say something to them in Zapotec to break the ice.

"No, *señor*," he replied, "I am Mixtec and do not know a word of their language."

"I hope all the Indians we meet aren't going to be as morose as these," I said to Vicho. "I hate to go away without having got a flicker of a smile from any of them."

I was stiff with cold and as I tried to throw my leg over the saddle I slipped and fell flat on my back in the mud and manure.

When I got up I saw all the Indians standing in front of the *fonda* grinning and laughing.

Vicho, disgusted with the performance of his little mare, put the pack on its back and saddled the mule. Although it had never been saddled before, he had gained such mastery over the brute that it made no resistance. But it did not understand his signals, and our progress was made slower by the change, so that after a few hours Vicho gave up the experiment and went back to his first mount.

As we left Cuajimoloyas a brilliant rainbow appeared in the sky. It seemed very near, just as though it ended right in a part of the town. But I cannot imagine a more futile place to look for the fabled pot of gold.

After a while the heavy mists turned to a light rain that drifted through the pine tops or drove through the open spaces. We had to use one of our *mangas* to cover our baggage, and Vicho insisted it should be his, as he had a canvas coat. In undoing mine from behind my saddle I forgot that I had tied my canteen of water by one of the thongs, and it fell without my noticing it and was lost.

Shortly after this incident we came to a stream bridged by logs. Vultures and a horrible stench announced the presence of some dead thing, and when we reached the bridge we saw it. One of the logs had given way under the weight of a mule and the carcass of the animal was lying half-submerged in the stream. Its bloated belly and stiff hindquarters were sticking out and

there was a gory hole in its side where the scavenging birds had been feasting.

No amount of persuasion would make our animals cross that bridge, and we had to beat our way downstream until we found a fordable place.

Darkness began to descend on the mountains long before we were near the next village on our itinerary. And when we came to a lonely *jacal* in a clearing we stopped to make inquiries. A woman surrounded by a dozen staring boys and girls told us that in about an hour we would come to a *ranchería*, or tiny settlement, called Los Mulatos.

When we reached Los Mulatos there seemed nothing for it but to spend the night there with an Indian family who rather grudgingly offered to take us in and provide fodder for our animals.

While the women prepared supper I hugged the fire in an effort to thaw out, and Vicho worked on our word list. Once he looked up and cried, "My God! what is that?" Something about five feet long and two inches around was twisting and writhing in the ashes. All the Indians laughed.

"*Es tripa de toro* (bull tripe)," explained the chief of the family.

This virile old Indian had provided social security for himself in the form of progeny too numerous to check accurately. Women of all ages came and went about various chores—fetching wood and water, grinding corn, tending babies. The older children squatted on the edge of the circle of firelight, but in the shadowed depths of the *jacal* I could detect furtive movements, and now and then a leaping flame would light up a dark face with gleaming white teeth and bright beady eyes. Young men came in shouldering muzzle-loading flint-lock rifles of the time of Maximilian with which they had been hunting deer in the forests.

They alone showed any curiosity about us and where we had come from. Their questions showed that they were not content

with the life of Los Mulatos and yearned for the world beyond. They wanted to know how much we paid for things—Vicho's electric lantern, our boots, my knife—and what we called them in English. How much could a man earn in the United States? How long would it take to walk there?

They had lusty appetites and clamored for food.

The old mother thriftily pushed the cedar logs into the fire a few inches at a time in the characteristic Indian way. She set the clay pots containing the potatoes and coffee by the flames and warmed the tripe and *tortillas* on the ashes. After they had all eaten and fed the dogs, we were given a bowl of muddy black coffee and a *tortilla* each—all that was left.

Then the old man lit a pitch pine torch and led us across the muddy corral to a shed for storing corn. He spread a mat on a low wooden platform and said:

"This is where you sleep."

The shed had a door but was open above to the wintry blasts of the wet north wind. The altitude was about 10,000 feet above sea level and the cold was bitter. We made a mattress of corn shucks, put on all the clothes we had and rolled up in our blankets. But we slept little, not only because of the discomfort and cold but because of the pain in our knees and ankles caused by the shortness of our stirrups and the cramped position of our legs while riding all day. That is one of the penalties long-legged Nordics pay when traveling by horse in countries where saddles are made for a smaller race.

At four o'clock the men were astir and we got up. But I missed the notebook which I carried in a pocket of my khaki shirt. It had slipped out during the night and was nowhere to be found, although we spent two hours tearing the place apart. We finally concluded that a rat must have made off with it. But it was a loss that made me melancholy all day as we plodded in the rain through the wooded mountains over trails that ran with water or were bogs of mud.

Once my horse fell and I slid off over its rump. Too late Vicho

shouted to me to try and keep my seat. As the animal struggled to its feet it stepped on my right foot, bruising it badly.

"Always stay in the saddle if your horse slips. Otherwise it may break its leg," said Vicho. A few days later he had a chance to give me an object lesson.

All the Indians we met on the trail told us that it would be impossible to reach Villa Alta according to our itinerary, as there was a big river in flood on the way which it was impossible to cross. They advised us to go to Yalalag by way of the Cañones. So we altered our route accordingly.

In spite of my *manga* I was wet through. Trudging along in the mud inside the big black square of shiny rubber I felt, and probably looked, like a kind of penguin.

Early in the afternoon we reached San Francisco Cajón, a picturesque little village of white walls, red roofs, and green gardens, hanging on the side of a mountain beneath a great cliff of rock. Primitive as the town was, it was an age in advance of Cuajimoloyas and Los Mulatos. We went to the little *fonda*, where we secured fodder for our mounts and a cheery Indian woman served us steaming bowls of *posole*, or corn gruel, peppered with chili, and fried eggs and black coffee.

We left the village by a narrow street that slanted down between upflung gardens of maguey. In every yard we saw the wheels, like wooden grindstones, for spinning the fiber into rope.

We were now on the side of a great ridge, separated from our goal by an immense valley filled with drifting white mists. Occasionally these broke and permitted us to see the towers of a church across the valley. On wings it would have taken only minutes to get there, but on foot it would take hours. We were able to do very little riding down the soapy trails. Sometimes we slid for thirty feet like skiers; at other times we sank to our boot tops in mire. There were rivers to cross by giant leaps from boulder to boulder with the fury of the torrent daring us to fail. Then the slow toilsome ascent.

Darkness as well as mist shut out all the world except the trail

a few yards in advance. I shall never forget how my heart leaped at the sound of church bells in answering chimes, telling us of human habitation soon to be reached. I pictured a pretty little town with perhaps an inn with a bed. But when we arrived we found that the churches were mere ruined shells and there was no town, no bed, and not even a dry shelter for the animals.

"The horses aren't shod," Vicho said. "If they stand in the mud all night it will make them lame."

So for the sake of the horses' hoofs, we kept on.

After an hour or so the mists rolled away, disclosing a new moon which cast a bland light over the valley. As we descended we could hear the growing roar of a river. Slowly we crept down to it and crossed it by a beautiful span of white masonry. Now we drove our horses before us, holding to their tails to help us up the opposite climb.

At last we heard the bark of a dog and saw the silhouette of a house at the turn of the road. It proved to be a roadside shrine where a hundred candles were burning before the image of the crucified Christ. On the slope of the next hill lay the sleeping village of Yalalag.

Not a soul was abroad as we rode into the plaza and dismounted before the municipal palace, but we found some men sleeping on the floor of the corridor and, waking them, said we wished to be taken to the *presidente*. They asked us to wait while they went to see what they could do. After some time they came back with an able-looking official who introduced himself as Samuel Vargas, the *comandante*, "at your service."

He made some polite excuse as to why the *presidente* was not visible at that hour and then, after carefully reading our letter from the governor by the light of an electric torch, invited us to occupy an unused portion of his own home, where we would be better off than in the rooms reserved for such chance visitors as ourselves. There was no inn of any sort.

The house had two stories. Across the front was printed in large letters "*Los Tres Caravales*" (The Three Caravels) and he



explained that once he had operated a shop. We passed around to the rear patio and climbed to a small balcony. Unlocking a padlocked door, he let us in with the aid of flashlights and we saw at once that we were going to be blissfully comfortable. There was a small room with a bed and a larger one, used as a storeroom, with a bench and a mattress that could be laid upon it.

We thanked him and, that our thanks should not seem idle, gave him a bottle of *habanero* which he opened and passed among his men. Then we deposited our luggage, changed our wet clothes for dry ones, and went to the little *fonda* where we had previously sent Emilio to see if we could get something to eat. Here we met good-souled Natividad, whom we were soon to call *Tia* (Aunt) and who uncomplainingly whipped up some black beans, *tortillas*, and black coffee for us. It didn't matter then or later that the walls were crawling with uninvited guests.



## XVII: YALALAG

**Y**ALALAG meanders in delightful Indian fashion all over the hills. The white houses with their dark tiled roofs, each with a cross on the roof tree, are set anywhere it seemed best to the builder. It is a pure Zapotec village of about four thousand inhabitants, existing communally without outside interference. There are no Mexican soldiers lounging about nursing their guns; no beggars or cripples. The *presidente* and other civic officials are elected annually and serve without pay. Everyone works and helps to keep the town tidy. Our friend the *comandante* was a hat maker, but every morning he swept the street in front of his house and once a week he dug out the weeds that had sprung up between the paving stones. Social differences are unknown.

There is no agrarian problem, as the Indians have never given up their lands. The only settlement ever attempted by the whites in the whole Yalalag sierra was at Villa Alta, which was founded by Gaspar Pacheco, a general of Cortes, at the time of the Conquest. But as soon as the Indians understood the Spaniards' intention to loot and enslave, they stopped them right there.

That morning at breakfast we tried out our Zapotec vocab-

ulary on Natividad, but she did not understand us any better than the Indians of Los Mulatos had understood the words we had learned on the way to Tlacolula. But she was pleased that we wanted to learn the language and soon taught us how to ask for what we wanted.

Thereafter we always asked for *yeta* when we wanted *tortillas* and *yetsba* when we wanted them hot, and thanked her by saying *urshkano* instead of *gracias*.

Her *fonda* was an adobe hut with unplastered walls overrun with cockroaches. She cooked on an adobe *poyo*, or charcoal stove, always littered with a variety of soot-blackened clay cooking utensils. The place was frequented by traveling Indians and two mestizo school teachers who did not speak Zapotec.

It was also frequented by scavenging dogs which paid no attention to us when we shouted "*perro!*" at them but when we learned to cry "*bayaku!*" they put their tails between their legs and ran. We were delighted that even the pooches understood our Zapotec.

The offer of a *yes* (cigarette) always served as a friendly opening, and we found the Indians talkative, intelligent, and fun-loving. At every meal we added to our vocabulary as well as to our *avoirduois*, for we both began to gain on a diet that consisted mainly of *tortillas* and black beans. We learned to say *nabeesdjajo* (until we meet again) instead of the Spanish *buen provecho* (may it benefit you) when we got up from table, and the Indians responded warmly to their own formula where they remained indifferent to the other.

After breakfast we called on the *presidente* at the municipal palace.

We were somewhat surprised to find him a young man of about Vicho's age, dressed in an open shirt and trousers like everyone else. He was slender, or rather lithe, and had proud handsome Indian features, the lines of which I have seen mirrored in many a carving of a Zapotec god.

His name was Manuel Ignacio Perella. He was elected to serve

one year, according to the Zapotec tradition, which requires every male to serve his turn in some official capacity. From the ages of fifteen to sixty there is no escaping this service.

At the beginning of our interview he endeavored to preserve the dignity which he felt went with his office, but when our questions surprised or amused him he broke down and became his natural boyish self.

He told us that at the end of his term he was required to remain as adviser to his successor for another year.

Before the Revolution (which in Mexico refers to the overthrow of Diaz in 1910 and the beginning of Mexico's real struggle for self-government) Yalalag had a population of seven thousand. But every year more and more young couples leave to seek their fortune in Vera Cruz, Oaxaca, or the capital. This is because the forests have been cut down and the land impoverished by uninterrupted production and erosion. There is no irrigation, and if the rains fail to come at the right time the single corn crop fails, and there is not enough to eat.

The main crops raised for outside markets are chili and oranges, and the chief industries are the manufacture of felt hats, the weaving of white cotton carrying cloths and the bottling of carbonated spring water. The chili beds were being seeded now for the winter crop. A type of *huarache* for women that had a low leather heel with a stitched design, is also a specialty of Yalalag, although the heels are made in the village of Zoogacho.

When we asked the name of the river we had crossed on the way to Yalalag, the *presidente* and his council were all taken aback. They had apparently never thought that a river needed to be known by a name. They simply called it *yagu*, which is Zapotec for river.

Crime of any sort was rare. The most common offense was drunkenness.

"What about robbery?" we asked.

"There are very few cases," he said. "If it is a first offense the robber is made to restore the stolen property and is then set at

liberty. The second time he is put in jail for twenty or thirty days. The third time he is hung."

At last we came to the subject of matrimony, and learned that while there are no June brides, marriage is strictly a calendrical rite.

Marriages are arranged by parents, without consulting their children, during the months of October, November, and December and take place during January, February, April, and May. There are no weddings in June, July, August, and September.

Girls are married at the ages of fifteen and sixteen, and men at twenty.

The father looks for a wife for his son, but there is usually an understanding between the young people first. As a preliminary overture the youth's father calls on the father of the girl and tells him, with proper indirectness over their wine or *aguardiente*, that he wants a girl for his boy. Having gained consent, he brings gifts of food and drink, and the day is fixed.

"Are they married in church?" we asked.

"Yes," said the young *presidente*, "but first they appear before me and I pronounce them husband and woman in the name of society."

After the services there is a big celebration with feasting and dancing of the *jarabe* Yalalteca.

"But how does the boy arrange a previous understanding with the girl?" we wanted to know.

"Usually through a second person—a woman—who acts as a go-between and carries notes and messages for them," he said.

According to Indian folk tales, the go-between is a little bird—a hummingbird. A person whose love is unrequited will go to a witch doctor for the powdered ashes of a hummingbird to use as a love charm.

If a man fails to win a woman and his love turns to hate, he will bury the tooth of a rattlesnake where she has urinated to make her dry up and die. But it is almost unknown for an Indian to commit suicide for love.

"If a married couple don't like each other," said our informant, "they get a divorce."

We told the *presidente* that we would like to see the commercial activities of Yalalag, and he obligingly told off a young official to show us the hat maker, *buarache* maker, and candlestick maker at their work. Everyone was pleasant and patient, answered all our questions good-humoredly and showed us every step of the various processes. I have never been among kindlier people, and I could not help recalling the warnings we had received that we were going into a den of cutthroats.

Owing to the inclement weather, there were few women in evidence, so that I did not see the costumes that had originally lured me to Yalalag.

But toward the end of the day we went to see a weaver at her loom. She was no beauty and was not dressed beautifully, but she posed willingly. She was weaving the striped tan skirt that is worn under the long white Yalalag *buipil*, and her loom was composed of two sticks, one tied to a post and the other held by a leather strap about her waist after the fashion of Indian looms since long before Columbus came; but unlike any weaver I had previously seen, she leaned against her loom in a standing position. Vicho took some snapshots of her and I offered her some change by way of stressing our thanks for her trouble. But instead of seeming pleased and accepting the money, she put her hands behind her back and began to cry. Mystified, we sought the reason, and were somewhat amazed to learn that we had offended her, because she wanted, not pay, but a picture.

During this episode some of the neighbors had come in, and one of them was a young woman with the beauty of a princess. Small but perfectly proportioned, she had delicate hands and feet, and breasts that gave form to her formless *buipil*. Her face had the childlike contours of her type, and her dark eyes were as large as a fawn's and elongated, giving them an expression of both innocence and mystery, while her little nose and full mouth

were infantile, as if not yet fully formed. She was altogether lovely.

While I was taking in her beauty, her eyes were gloating on Vicho's wavy blond hair, blue eyes, clean-cut features, and tall boyish figure. Vicho, too, had noticed her and was well aware of her charms, although probably without taking an artist's inventory of them as I had done.

Vicho is not a fictional character, so I cannot pretend to know all that went on in his heart and head. It was not a simple case of boy meets girl, although it was the only time during our entire trip that I saw Vicho troubled about a woman.

But although we saw much of Petra—for that proved to be her name—and it was she who gave my companion the name of Vicho (Zapotec for Clear-eyed) which will probably stick with him for the rest of his life, she was already married and had two little children as pretty as herself.

Once she asked him boldly to leave a *buerito* (little blond) with her as a remembrance, but he seemed to take it only in a complimentary sense. His blondness and home-made hair oil attracted Indian women wherever we went, and many of them offered to make him a father.

The weather continuing overcast the next day, we took care of odd chores in the morning and in the afternoon inspected the school.

There were three classes of from twelve to twenty pupils between the ages of seven and fourteen. The classes of the younger children were mixed and taught by the two young mestizo women from Oaxaca whom we had met at Natividad's *fonda*, while the older boys were in charge of an Indian master.

Since at the age of fifteen the girls usually marry and the boys have to begin playing the part of men, the Indian children are only given four years of schooling, and this amounts to little more than kindergarten work. Attendance is very irregular, as the parents consider that home and field duties come first.

In the morning the children are taught Spanish—more or less by the Berlitz system, as the teachers do not speak the Indian dialect—and elementary mathematics; and in the afternoon, embroidery and drawing. I thought it unfortunate that these last two subjects were taught according to Spanish, and not native, tradition. The girls learned to embroider roses of Castile instead of Indian motifs, while the boys were made to copy anatomical charts and photographic illustrations from books and magazines. I realized, however, that the idea was not to give art instruction, but to broaden the children's mental outlook by means of pictures. Still, there were a few artistically gifted pupils who could not see realistically and who spontaneously created extraordinary designs.

One budding Rivera had the true spirit. He filled notebooks with drawings in and out of school, often forgetting to copy and expressing his own imagination and direct observation. Among his fanciful drawings he had pictured a man standing on the back of a whale.

"Is that Jonah?" I asked.

"No, *señor*," he replied, "it is Father Hidalgo."

"But why is he standing on the whale's back?"

The young artist thought for a second; then he said:

"To keep his feet dry!"





## XVIII: WAKING THE DEAD

MARKET day in Yalalag dawned clear, and for this we were duly thankful, as it was the day that would bring out the village women in their best finery and attract many others from remote hill towns. On our way to breakfast we saw that the plaza was filling rapidly with vendors.

This morning Natividad gave us *pan de muertos* (bread of the dead) in place of the usual *tortillas*. These wheat-flour buns, raised with sour *pulque* as a substitute for yeast, were made in the form of doll-like figures with little white faces of flour paste formed in clay molds. During the next nine days they would be served as a reminder of the approaching merry fiesta of the dead.

Market day, we found, with its great influx of out-of-towners, complicated the sanitary problem. Yalalag's public toilets, which were very public indeed, being a row of open-faced booths for both men and women, were flushed only once a day early in the morning. Except for first-comers, they were not inviting. On this day they were revolting.

I was reminded of a story I had often heard in Mexico of an American woman who, puzzled by the lack of sanitary ac-

commodations, timidly asked a Mexican gentleman where she could find an *excusado*. The man bowed politely and with an inclusive wave of the hand said:

"Lady, the land is yours."

Returning to the plaza we saw a scene of tremendous animation and interest. The square was patterned in black and white with accents of brilliant colors.

Shifting masses of white were formed by the snowy *huipiles* of the Yalaltecas; black by their *rebosos*, raven hair, and imposing *rodetas*, or headdresses; and color by decorative touches, produce and merchandise and the costumes of the visiting Mixe women. The Mixes, who speak no Spanish and seldom venture nearer to civilization than Yalalag, wear a bloused knee-length tunic, very full, of a gray-green color worn over an ankle-length skirt, a heavy collar of blue and white beads and a thick circular head-dress of vivid red wool. It is a strange, rather than a beautiful, costume.

The Mixes not only speak a language radically different from other Indian dialects but even their features are un-Indian. It is said they are of European stock and that their speech is better understood by people from the Scandinavian countries than by their own immediate neighbors.

The dress of the Yalaltecas is the simplest and loveliest in all Mexico. It is composed of two garments—a three-quarter length underskirt with a faint lateral tan stripe, and a loose-fitting overtunic of pure white cotton of a heavy, firm, and intricate weave hanging in classical lines to below the line of the knee. The neck opening is in the form of a V before and behind and at the points are horizontal twists of gay-colored silk with tassels drooping to a length of a foot or more. The bottom hem is finished with colored silk embroidery, and some of the finest tunics have touches of rich needlework up the sides or over the shoulders.

But what gives the costume its amazing barbaric dignity is the *rodeta*. This is a double coil of deep black wool yarn bound

in some mysterious way with the hair and twisted in a gigantic braid on top of the head. This striking black headdress worn with glistening white is literally a *tour de force*. It took Petra, who posed for me that afternoon, fully two hours to arrange her *rodeta*.

All morning, to the vast entertainment of a circle of Indian children, I filled a sketch book with notes of the market.

Among the oddities offered for sale were the hoofs of cattle, which stood around queerly without bodies, baskets of beautiful enamel-like grasshoppers, milky *pulque*, and the unfermented *agua miel*, iced by the altitude and sold at little stands protected from the sun by frames of white canvas supported by a pole. I saw the fish merchant from Tehuantepec whom we had passed on the trail, doing a lively business in dried fish.

The sun at noon was filled with tropical warmth and for the first time, day or night, since leaving Tlacolula, I removed my sweater, and as I did so I shouted for joy; for from one of the sleeves fell the little book of travel notes which I thought I had lost at Los Mulatos.

Vicho and I were having so much fun in Yalalag that we would have liked to linger on indefinitely. But I was driven by my quest for color.

In Tancanhuitz, Uruápan, Oaxaca City, and now in Yalalag I had found Indian costumes that were curious and often beautiful, but which in color only faintly approximated the lusty hues of Guatemala.

So we asked Tia Natividad to buy a dozen eggs, and some meat, cheese, and fruit in the market and to make two dozen *tortillas* to take with us on our return trip to Tlacolula, as we had learned on inquiry that there were no villages where we could get food along the way.

Our adopted aunt took as much thought to these preparations as if she had been a blood relative. And at suppertime she showed us her purchases, which included as a surprise a pint of fried

grasshoppers! She pretended to be cruelly disappointed when we passed them up.

"Try them and see how good they are," she urged, putting some on the table before us and eating a few herself with evident relish.

I am sorry now that I didn't take one, but as much as I like to sample exotic foods on my travels, whenever I put out my hand my stomach said, Unh-uh!

Tia Natividad then asked us how many eggs made a dozen.

"Twelve," we said.

"Always?"

"Yes, always."

"But I bought you a dozen of eleven," she said. "Count them yourselves and see if I am not right."

She was right, all right. The eleventh egg had a double yolk!

To show us that our friendly regard was mutually shared, the town that night gave a dance in our honor. Our genial host Comandante Vargas, and our young friend Presidente Perella wanted us to know the *jarabe* Yalalteca.

The largest room of the school house was cleared of its desks and tables and the chairs and benches ranged around the walls. The girls—pick of the best dancers—sat on one side of the room and we men on the other. An orchestra composed of five guitarists, two banjoists, and three violinists first saluted us with some American airs which they had learned from phonograph records. Then they struck up the blood-compelling music of the native *jarabe*, the young men chose their partners, and the dance was on.

And what a dance! It was like an old-fashioned barn dance in jitterbug time. The young men held the girls' hands high, and as they leaped and turned, swayed and whirled to the intoxicating rhythm, it seemed almost as though they were so many marionettes animated by the twanging strings of the musicians.

Hardly did the little bare feet of the girls touch the floor as, with the supple grace of wood nymphs, they responded to the magic of the dance. Their flaring white tunics swirled freely

in circular rhythms like the skirts of ballet dancers, revealing every seductive curve and movement of their willowy bodies. Their golden cheeks were flushed with color as if with passion, and their parted lips disclosed the pearllike gleam of perfect teeth. And with every sweeping turn the coiled magnificence of the black wool headdresses accented some new angle of the head with barbaric beauty.

Now young men cut in on the first, and then came other fresh relays of dancers, strong and virile, testing the endurance of the girls until they seemed almost superhuman. But at last the rhythmic marathon ended, and the men led their flaming-cheeked partners to their seats.

I offered to buy mescal for the musicians and dancers, but Señor Vargas shook his head wisely and said they would be just as happy with soda pop. So we sent out for two cases of pop, and quantities of cookies and cigarettes.

But all were not happy with such light refreshments, it seemed, for as the dance went on one of the young men and his partner showed that they were intoxicated by something stronger than the music of the *jarabe*, and their gyrations became so wild that several times, amidst the shouting laughter of the onlookers, they fell sprawling upon the floor.

We were now urged to take part in the dance, and some of the men brought us partners. Mine was the youngest and most popular, and I started out with great jest and amidst wild applause; but before long I was forced to signal imploringly to a young Indian to relieve me. Vicho, however, danced the whole rest of the evening and appeared to enjoy it, although if he had been ready to drop his spirit would not have permitted him to show it.

At last the big clock in the church boomed midnight, and the party broke up.

We went home and to bed with our boots on, as we expected to start out early on our trip back to Tlacolula. But I had hardly fallen asleep when I was awakened by the demonic clang-

ing of church bells. I cursed the religious fanaticism of the Indians and tried to go back to sleep, but before the pulsing rhythm of the bells died on the air my blood was chilled by the most unearthly musical discords. Voices joined in a funereal chant. I rubbed my eyes to make sure I wasn't dreaming, and that the music was not merely a macabre echo of the *jarabe*. But, no. I was awake. The voices were real. They rose to a high wail that trailed off into a ghostly shiver of wind music. Then the piping notes of a primitive flute rose and fell to the dull pounding throb of a drum, and I knew that some weird Indian rite was taking place.

I got up and called to Vicho, but he was sleeping like a person drugged, so I went out alone to investigate.

In the gloom I distinguished white-shrouded forms flitting to a rendezvous at the church. When I arrived there I was astonished to find the doors flung wide and the nave ablaze with candles and pine torches and filled with kneeling figures before the gold and white richness of the altar.

Hunched over a little sputtering fire of pitch pine in the outer darkness of the church yard, were the flutist and drummer.

As I tried to take it all in, more silent figures slipped past me and entered the flame-lit church.

Then, with a burst of sound that startled me, a band of wind instruments concealed in the dark corridors of the school building began again the unearthly music that I had first heard on awakening, and the kneeling Indians gave voice to the nerve-rasping refrain. I stood transfixed in a daze of wonder until I thought of Vicho, and went back to fetch him.

On our return, however, the church was black and empty. Only the smoldering embers of a little fire in the church yard where the flute and drum players had been stationed proved that I hadn't dreamed or imagined the amazing scene.

But on the instant that we were turning back, the clashing discords of the cornets and horns burst out of the darkness, as if Satan's own band were tuning up for an infernal concert.

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed Vicho. "That's enough to wake the dead."

We stumbled through the darkness in the direction of the music, but before long we found the way lit at intervals of every hundred yards or so by lighted faggots placed on stones. The air was fragrant with the odor of burning pitch. Gruntings of disturbed pigs came from behind the black cornstalk fences. Now and again dark figures, standing as still as idols above the path, watched us curiously.

Suddenly, on topping a rise, we saw an arc of flickering light below us, like a terrestrial milky way. It was formed by hundreds of lighted tapers carried by white-clad figures standing along a curve of the path.

We quickened our steps and as we drew nearer the band stopped playing and we heard a man's voice intoning a ritual prayer. We stopped in the darkness where we could watch and listen without being seen.

We saw the shaman, dressed in a white surplice, facing a litter on which stood a statue of the Virgin and Child. She was dressed in a white robe and wore a golden crown. At the shaman's back stood three boys. The one in the center carried a high cross, while those on either side held six-foot-tall candlesticks with immense tapers. The whole scene was sculptured from the darkness by countless chisel points of light.

The litany was followed by high-voiced chanting in a minor key. Then the raucous band struck up a tuneless chord and continued in a crescendo of dissonance, as the procession moved on.

The pictorial effect held me spellbound, especially when the marchers filed along the top of a ridge across a curving *barranca* and were silhouetted in marble white against the velvety depths of the before-dawn darkness. A great stage director could not have achieved a more thrilling effect than the Indians attained through their native sense of drama.

After several pauses during which the eerie ritual was repeated,

the procession finally arrived at the white-stoned cemetery on the top of a hill. We crept close enough to catch part of the litany addressed to the dead in Spanish and then repeated in Zapotec.

A fog swept in, wrapping the candle-lit gathering in torn veils of mist, making wraiths of reality and lending an other-world eeriness to everything. Once more the horns blared until the tombstones trembled, and the ghosts in the grayness raised their harsh voices in a last hair-raising hymn. The earth gave out an icy exhalation, and I shook all over, though I cannot say whether it was from fear or cold.

We crouched in the shadows when the marchers started back and then followed them into the town. They took the Virgin back into the church, blew out their candles, and dispersed with magic swiftness. We went home and lay down, but I could not sleep for thinking of the strange spectacle we had witnessed and wondering what it signified.

At the *fonda* next morning Tia Natividad looked at us quizzically and said:

"I heard you went to the cemetery last night."

"Yes," Vicho said, "and we came back with three of the dead."

Natividad laughed, but some of the Indians in the *fonda* looked startled.

"Is it customary to go to the cemetery at three o'clock in the morning?" we asked.

Natividad nodded, "From now until the Day of the Dead, nine days hence, there will be visits to the graveyard."

"But why does the band make such a discordant racket?" we asked.

"That," said Natividad, "is to wake the dead."





## XIX: SUNSHINE AND SONG

REST had made our pack mule wild again. When Emilio tried to put our luggage on its back it reared and kicked, and the boy was too frightened to go near it again. So Vicho had to tame it all over. This time he had to use strong-arm methods and give the brute the third degree by snubbing its nose against a post, which made it squeal with pain and rage. Half the juvenile population of Yalalag turned out to watch the performance.

So, instead of an early start, it was after ten in the morning before we trotted out of town after bidding *Nabeesdjajo* to all our good Zapotec friends.

It was a morning of crystal light in which the lofty mountains stood out in sunny outlines, brave and clear. We could see the little town of Yaganizia shining whitely on the heights of the opposite range, looking deceptively near with the telescopic vision given us by the pure rain-washed atmosphere.

We passed men in white driving sheep or cattle and pack trains of burros, laden with boxes of Procter & Gamble's laundry soap.

In the fields, men were planting chili, or covering the seedlings with a protective mat of dried brush.

They would greet us automatically with "*Adios*," but when we replied with "*Nabeesdjajo*" they would stare in surprise, and then their faces would light up with a friendly smile.

We were sad at leaving Yalalag, but hopeful that all our future experiences among the natives would be as happy.

Vicho broke into song. He rode in the lead, his lithe form slouched in the saddle, one long leg thrown over the pommel, singing full-throatedly, as a bird sings to the sunshine, because the songs were throbbing in his blood and his lungs ached to release the abundance of his energy and high spirits.

The Indians we met brightened when we passed, and invariably said to me:

"*Muy alegre, su companero.*" (Your friend is very gay.)

A miraculous change had come over the boy. I could no longer recognize the pale, nervous, silent youth I had first met in Mexico City and who impressed me as a studious weakling that would be more of a liability than an asset on a trip into the wilds. He had filled out, gained a robust color and animation, like one who was born to the outdoors and has happily returned to his natural element.

He kept looking back at Yalalag, but I do not think it was merely the town that he saw. Rather it was the kindly *comandante*, Samuel Vargas, who would not take anything but our thanks for his hospitality; ever-smiling Tia Natividad, who had cared for us like kin; and lovely Petra, who had looked into his clear blue eyes and called him Vicho.

Yalalag remained a sentimental memory in the back of his mind ever afterward, and no day passed without his recalling our stay there, and our limited Zapotec became a part of our personal conversation.

As we neared Yaganizia we forded a crystalline stream in which six young Indian women were bathing beneath a bridal-veil falls which fell through an alcove of greenery. The lacy

spray was all that covered their Eden-like nakedness. Tiny diamond-bright drops bedewed their loose hair which streamed down their backs like molten jet. Sunlight, filtered through a canopy of leaves and nodding ferns, gleamed on the gold-ruddy fullness of their shoulders and breasts as upon burnished metal. Some sat on their heels, Indian-fashion, in the translucent water, dipping it up in gourds and pouring it languidly over their glistening bodies. Others stood, unabashed by our passing, unconsciously—almost proudly, it seemed—displaying the sparkling color and curving lines of their nudity.

There is something perfect about pagan beauty—a natural artistry unaltered by civilized artifices that creates a harmony of all the parts. Fashion experts use all their cunning to design clothes that conceal the ugly and reveal only what will ravish us poor men—a radiant face, certain undulating outlines, and extended ovals. But it is a rather painful operation mentally to suppress what is commonplace and confine one's gaze only to what goodness a woman may possess. Beauty is harmony. A woman who is equally ugly is often less disagreeable to look at than one who is unequally beautiful.

As a painter, I ask only one thing of women—beauty. A woman who is beautiful is, for me, complete. The senses are not stimulated by wit; quite the contrary. I prefer a well-modeled shoulder to a well-turned phrase; sparkling color, to sparkling wit. Beauty is the epitome of self-sufficiency. One does not wish to add or subtract from the contour of a mountain, the color of a rose, or the texture of a lily. And when one finds beauty among pagan people, one has no desire to see it either hidden or embellished, even by the costliest stuffs, cosmetics and perfumes ever devised in the courts of decadence.

Now for some time we wandered confusedly in a maze of lanes bordered by cornstalk fences through the town of Yaganizia. Within the yards were white adobe *jacales* with old tile roofs, from the eaves of which hung strands of pale maguey fiber for making rope. And on lines strung between the trees

were more bunches of fiber, looking like platinum blonde wigs, bleaching under the blazing sun. Women, bare to the waist, and naked children, moved lethargically in the quiet spaces of sunlight and shadow.

Above the town, the trail became too steep and stony for further riding, and we dismounted and exercised our legs. Up and up we zigzagged until, heated and happy, we conquered the summit with as much satisfaction as if it had been Everest. For the last time we looked back upon Yalalag, now only a white speck gleaming on the far mountainside. As if it were still within hailing distance, we shouted:

*"Nab-ees-dja-jo!"*

During all the rest of the day, as we rode and walked through wonderful pine forests, filled with peace and scent, we encountered no living soul or sign of human habitation. The scenery was so familiar and typical that we might have imagined ourselves in the coast range of California or the Adirondacks of New York, except for the orchids, airplants, and grisly gray moss clinging parasitically to the limbs of the trees, and the strange cactus forms that cropped up out of the earth and rocks.

Toward dusk, however, we saw kilns for burning lime, and as we wound downward under curtainlike cliffs of gray rock to a broad valley watered by a silvery stream we found extensive fields of corn, but it was long before we actually met anyone or discerned a house top. Darkness was swiftly flooding the valley when, weary from our exciting last night in Yalalag as well as the day's journey, we arrived in the primitive village of Santa Caterina, buried deep in corn.

We rode up to a miserable little *meson*, but were told that there was neither food nor lodging for ourselves nor fodder for our animals. Vicho, however, explained that all we wanted was a bowl of black coffee and a reed mat to sleep on and after much palaver this meager comfort was vouchsafed us. Then Emilio and Vicho scoured the town until they found someone who would sell them some fodder.

Our Zapotec was not understood in Santa Caterina, but a family of Yalaltecos who were spending the night at the *meson*, on hearing us speak their idiom, invited us to share their supper fire. So we sat with them and talked while they warmed our *tortillas* with theirs in the ashes. Then we spread our mats next to theirs on the floor of the corridor and prepared to spend the night in the open. The women undressed in front of us with no more concern than if we had been Indians, and I took a painter's delight in watching the play of firelight upon the ruddy bronze of their bodies. Then we all rolled up in our blankets and lay down upon our hard mats. But although I was tired enough to have slept anywhere, I was beginning to find that drinking so much black coffee morning, noon, and night was playing havoc with my nerves, and my sleep was broken and gave me little rest.

I was lying awake long before the sky turned gray, and on looking at my watch I saw it was four o'clock. I shook Vicho and he started up singing, "Good morning to you..." Dark heads popped out of blankets with astonished expressions which turned to grins at the queer customs of the gringos. It was the Indians' time for getting up and one friendly Yalalteco, before starting out, fortified himself with a swig of mescal and passed the bottle to us, saying it was good to clear the head of sleep.

While we were breakfasting, after having saddled the horses and loaded the mule, I heard a bird singing gloriously to the rising sun. I looked all around for its cage, but could find none, and only by staring hard in the direction of the warbling was I finally able to distinguish a little white-throated brown bird camouflaged against the dark tile roof.

We climbed all morning up a steep steady ascent that seemed to have its summit in the stars. Once Vicho's mare fell under him, and only his horsemanship saved it from suffering a broken leg.

At last, after seven hours of grueling uphill work, we stood where we could mop the sweat from our brows and gaze down again with satisfaction upon the valley of Tlacolula.

It was almost a straight drop down a trail of stone steps cut into the rock, so we let our horses loose and descended on foot. The animals seemed to know they were getting near home and, on reaching more level ground, gave us some trouble catching them again.

Arrived in Tlacolula, we went to the general store to get information regarding the bus service to Totolapam, at which place we expected to get horses for Tehuantepec. And while we were talking with the clerk, who expressed surprise that we had made our trip to Yalalag without trouble with the Indians, an American woman tourist came in with a Mexican guide.

Vicho and the guide started talking in Spanish, and Vicho's Spanish was so perfectly idiomatic, that the woman apparently concluded she was in native company, for when I spoke to her she raised her eyebrows and said:

"You must have been in the States at some time or other. Your English is really very good."

This remark, coupled with her surprise at my speaking my native tongue, was like a mirror suddenly held before me, in which I saw myself for the first time with my sunburn, sprouting beard, stained and warped Panama, soiled khaki, and dusty boots. Quite unconsciously, we had gone native.



## XX: AFOOT TO TEHUANTEPEC

WE were surprised to find the road to Totolapam, although still partly under construction, the finest in the state of Oaxaca. This is due, not to the importance of Totolapam, which is one of the meanest Mexican villages, but to the fact that the road is to form a link in the great Inter-American Highway.

At the municipal palace—the lowliest adobe public building is given this title of magnificence—we inquired for the *presidente*. An *alcalde* went to summon him, for he was a baker in private life and was busy baking bread of the dead. At length he arrived, a wizened, gray-haired brown man, in no happy mood at being disturbed. We presented our letter from the governor, which he looked at upside down. Then, abandoning pretense, he passed it to his secretary, who read it aloud.

The *presidente* received the request for horses and a guide noncommittally. He seemed to prefer to talk of sealing wax and kings. He did not smoke the cigarettes we offered—a bad omen. I asked:

“Are the inhabitants of Totolapam Zapotec?”

"No," he replied haughtily, "they are pure Castilian."

At length, making no definite promises about the morrow, he went back to his bakery.

Vicho and I wandered about the village. It lay in a little sandy-floored valley surrounded by burned hills that seemed never to know dew or rain and that bristled with organ cactus like scared porcupines.

A turbulent brown river cut the sandy waste surrounding the town, while near and far the mountains we would have to cross raised their mighty shoulders in a formidable barrier.

Seeking out the *presidente* at his home, we found him removing fresh baked bread of the dead from a dutch oven by means of a long wooden shovel. He told us that no horses were to be had in the town.

"It is forty miles to the first village," he said. "It is very dangerous country, straight up (*pura subida*) and full of bandits. Besides there is no water. No one is willing to risk their animals on such a journey."

"Well," said Vicho, "it looks as though we would have to walk and take our chances on getting horses at the next village."

"We walked most of the time when we had horses," I observed. "So I can't see that it will make a great deal of difference."

That evening, however, in the little *fonda* where we had supper we met some young Mexican engineers who were surveying the new highway. When they learned that we were going overland to Tehuantepec, they offered to give us a lift in a truck to a place where they assured us we would have no trouble getting horses.

We were up at daybreak after spending a bad night trying to sleep on a cold floor that leaped and crawled with fleas and scorpions, but the truck did not leave until eleven.

At San Juanico, a tiny Zapotec village only a few miles away, we came to the end of the new highway and had to change trucks and to wait for over an hour. Vicho made himself com-



fortable in a sisal hammock on the porch of a *jacal*, while I nosed around the village.

I saw a woman building a fire in a small ovenlike adobe chamber attached to a similar chamber large enough to hold two or three persons. This, I learned, was a *temascal*, or steam bath, used by sick persons or by women on the eighth day after child birth. The person taking the cure enters the bath naked and the entrance is sealed up with stones. The occupant then splashes water from a jar provided for the purpose upon the heated wall until the room is filled with steam. It is customary to remain in the bath about two hours. The use of the steam bath after childbirth, it is curious to note, follows the Mosaic law of hygiene set forth in Leviticus. Sometimes women in the first months of an undesired pregnancy resort to the *temascal* in an effort to induce a miscarriage.

The truck in which we stood with Indians, laborers, and one of the engineers, amid boxes and tools, careened at break-neck speed over a narrow mountain road that would have engendered caution in anyone but a Mexican chauffeur. The boxes barked our shins, and twigs and shrubbery reaching out from the side bank whipped our faces if we failed to duck in time.

Burned, uninhabited, and spiny with organ cactus, the frightening mountains whizzed dizzily around us. So barren of life was this forbidding country that not even a black vulture was to be seen wheeling in the empty sky. The only moving thing in the landscape was the Tehuantepec River which writhed like a brown cobra through the canyon far below.

Once I saw a path like an ochreish crack on the side of the opposite ridge and asked the engineer, "Is there a village over there?"

But he shook his head and replied: "No. That trail leads to an ancient Zapotec ruin where the Indians still go to enact certain rites."

This information seemed quite in keeping. It was a land that

did not belong to today, although the building of the Inter-American Highway is already claiming it for tomorrow.

At last we saw a red hill with a little settlement of red earth huts, forlorn and sunswept, with hardly a blade of grass under which a grasspopper could find shade. And at three o'clock that afternoon we got down from the truck in Cerro Colorado (Red Hill) with eighty pounds of luggage and not a burro in sight.

Two Indians, however, were going our way and agreed to help us carry our equipment as far as a village called San José, three miles away, where we were told horses could be had.

We set out with loaded packs, the elder of the Indians a strong little man of thirty-five named Nicolas Olivera, showing the way. But the younger proved a weakling and lagged so far behind that he was more of a hindrance than a help.

There were horses and mules in San José, but although Nicolas, who was known in the village, did his best to secure them for us, no one would rent them. So we sat down to eat the light lunch we had brought along and to consider the best thing to do.

It suddenly dawned on us that we had come a great distance out of our way to no purpose. If we had held to our original plan and set out on foot at dawn we would have been halfway to Tehuantepec. But we had chosen a roundabout route only to find that we would have to use our own legs anyway. Worse still, we would now have to walk twenty-seven miles carrying all our equipment, in order to reach the town of Nejapa to which Nicolas was going. If we did not go with him, we would have no one to share our burdens or to guide us.

We paid off the young Indian who had proved a shirker, redistributed the luggage, and set off.

At dusk we heard a voice crying in the wilderness like a herdsman calling to his cattle, but Nicolas told us it was not a human voice.

"It is the *vaquero* bird," he said darkly. "Heard in the evening, it is a sign of bad luck."

I made a note of this Indian superstition, without seriously imagining that it would soon be fulfilled.

Darkness had fallen when we reached the first summit and began the opposite descent in a gloom made more intense by the clouds that hid even the light of the stars. In all my experience I have never been over a worse trail. Abrupt and closed in by thorny brush that clawed our flesh and clothes, it was filled with sharp stones that made walking difficult and bruised our feet even through our boots. Unable to see my companions before me, I followed them by the clatter of loose stones over which they tripped and stumbled. Twice our guide, despite his Indian sure-footedness, slipped and fell.

The mountains, so silent during the day, had become vocal with a myriad-voiced clamor. *Zarabanda* birds called to each other, owls hooted, night birds chattered like monkeys, insects hummed—*zing, zing, zing*—and tree frogs croaked and chirruped. Dark beastly shapes watched us silently from the bush.

I had foolishly put on coarse cotton socks and my feet were chafed until blisters formed. I felt as though I would drop with fatigue and pain, when we came at last to the bottom of the valley where the flood waters of the muddy Tehuantepec sped hissing like a great anaconda between sandy banks.

Nicolas made a fire to warm *tortillas*, which we ate with the rest of our lunch, and then we lay blissfully on the clean white sand. But we had still far to go and could not rest long.

During this respite the clouds broke up a little as a slip of a new moon rose wanly, shedding a ghostly light upon the river.

Nicolas stripped to ford the river, and Vicho and I did likewise. Our guide then took part of the luggage and, holding it over his head, entered the turbulent water. For a moment he stood like a miniature bronze statue of Hercules silhouetted against the gleaming surface of the river. Then he moved forward cautiously, sinking deeper and deeper. Now the force of the current caught him, and Vicho and I stood watching with strained nerves while he battled the flood. Every step that carried

him deeper carried him relentlessly downstream. One misstep and he would be lost and with him most of our equipment. At the angle he was moving it seemed impossible that he would reach the other side. But at last, to our great relief, we saw him rising higher and higher and knew that he had struck shallower water and was safe.

We waited until he deposited his burden on the other side and started back. Then Vicho, carrying Nicolas' clothes and his own as well as the money belt loaded with heavy silver pesos, stepped into the rushing water. As the current caught him and forced him downstream I heard him say:

"The stones on the bottom are moving so you can hardly stand."

"Take it easy," I warned.

Once I caught my breath as he stumbled. But he righted himself and pushed on. On he went, but with great difficulty. I saw Nicolas start toward him as if with a premonition. In my anxiety I unconsciously waded out from shore although my arms were filled and I would have been helpless to reach him. And at the very moment I realized this I saw him plunge head-long and sink beneath the swirling waters.

Nicolas sprang forward like a seal, and as Vicho came up, caught him and helped him to safety. By the time I joined them on the other bank, they were taking an inventory of the drenched clothing. Vicho had kept his head and most of his load, but he had lost his pants and with them the .22 automatic.

I gave them dry clothing, and we went on our way, through hours of darkness and over stony trails. The blisters on my feet grew worse until it seemed that the soles had been flayed and I was walking on raw flesh. When we had to ford another stream barefoot the icy stones felt like hot coals.

At one o'clock in the morning we entered Nejapa. Above the barking of the dogs we heard the strains of music and saw people dancing in the lighted plaza. The dance was the *Sandunga*, the steps of which were as staid as those of the *jarabe* of Yalalag had

been jittery, and this in spite of the fact the dancers and musicians were all wildly drunk.

Nicolas found an official who was sober enough to understand vaguely what was said to him, and arranged for us to spend the night in the schoolhouse where we could make ourselves comfortable on two tables, and then invited us to his own house for coffee. I knew that if I drank the coffee I would not sleep but that if I refused I would offend a man who had rendered us invaluable service. So I made my choice and spent a jumpy night.



## XXI: MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE

IN the morning, while Vicho went to look for horses, I administered first aid to my blistered feet and did my best to keep off them. But at noon Vicho returned with the news that he could get no horses and that the best he could do was to rent a pack burro with a guide from our friend Nicolas to take us to the next village, San Juan de la Jarcia. We would have to start at once, he said, in order to get there before nightfall.

I walked for six hours largely on nerve, although when we got to San Juan I had little enough of that left. To have walked the forty miles to Tequixistlán the next day would have been a physical impossibility. I had to have a horse.

But San Juan was the poorest of all the poverty-ridden villages we had seen. The *presidente* was a stupid lout who had not a word to say. He and the *sindico* and all the town officials prided themselves on being pure Castilian, but none could read our letter from the governor or form the least idea of our reason for having come among them. They sat around making ugly faces and spitting on the floor. When I happened to ask what the population of the town was they took me for the census taker,

and were ready to murder me on the spot. After that I kept still and let Vicho do the talking.

We sent out for some mescal and passed around cigarettes, but we had aroused their suspicion that we were government agents sent to spy on the community and it seemed impossible to gain their confidence. And the more they drank the worse the situation became.

The *sindico* got up and delivered a long harangue in which he said that the governor and President Cárdenas had visited San Juan and promised to give them irrigation, but they had gone away and forgotten their promise. The rains stop just when they are needed most and the corn shrivels up. And now the governor sends men (meaning ourselves) and expects them to be hospitably received when the town is so poor that the inhabitants are only living by the grace of God.

But Vicho finally prevailed on them to provide us with *tortillas* and two bowls of black coffee, and after we had eaten he settled down to try and make them understand that we must have a pack animal and a saddle animal to take us to Tequixistlán on the morrow.

Hours passed, however, without his getting anywhere. The *presidente* maintained his stolid silence while the others looked ugly and spat on the floor. Now and then the drunken *sindico* would leap to his feet and declaim against the unfaithful government that had let them down in the matter of irrigation.

At last Vicho got an idea. He dropped argument and persuasion and, asking them for some kernels of corn, began teaching them the childish game of three-in-a-line.

He started with the *sindico*. Then the others showed interest and wanted to learn. Even the *presidente* unbent and tried his hand at it. Laughing, excited, interested they pressed around. News of the new game spread through the town. Men drifted in from the darkness, to see it, discuss it, try it.

They looked upon Vicho now with respect, admiration, and friendliness. But when he thought the time was ripe to bring up

the subject of horses again, they were as discouraging as before. The *sindico* was about to give his harangue once more when Vicho, touched with inspiration, stopped him and said:

"If you will get us the animals we need, we will see that you get irrigation."

This master stroke of diplomacy changed their indifference into an eagerness to help us. They assured us that they would find two beasts for us if they had to conjure them out of thin air.

It was now after midnight, and we thought they would realize that we would like a little sleep, but although they threw a reed mat on the filthy floor for us to lie on they did not leave us. Some of them continued to play three-in-a-line, while the others sat around on benches watching us, as if we were under guard. This hub-bub and strange surveillance would have made us too uneasy to close our eyes, even if the floor had not been crawling with vermin.

At three o'clock a woman appeared, and we were told that she had brought our animals. We went out and examined them in the light of our electric lamp and Vicho's knowledge of livestock, and found them good. There was a fine saddle mule and a sturdy pack horse. The woman asked eight pesos to hire them for the trip, the price to include a *mozo* to guide us and bring them back. But if she had asked twice that sum I would not have haggled, for my feet were so completely crippled that I could hardly walk four steps, much less forty miles.

It was still dark when we left San Juan. For our conscience's sake we hoped that the government would not tarry too long in supplying the town with the water it so sorely needs, but we spared ourselves any unnecessary twinges with the thought that we had at least taught the townspeople to amuse themselves while they waited.

For hours we continued a gradual, almost unbroken descent into a country of lush tropical beauty. But its beauty was full of treachery, like that of an evil woman, and kept us wary and ever on the alert. Vicho strode ahead with his boundless youthful



energy, carrying his machete held ready and swinging at every real or fancied terror. The branches roofing the trail in interlaced density were hung with lianas like snakes and snakes like lianas. Once I saw Vicho step gingerly aside and brandish his machete in a clean arc, severing a brown stem. The lower half of the stem wriggled off into the bush, and when we examined the half that remained suspended we saw that it was the tail of a tree snake which we estimated to be fully six feet long and no larger around than one's middle finger. Another time he brushed a furry black and red creature from his hair to find that it was a tarantula.

But except for the poisonous green and yellow striped lizards that scurried out of our way, most of the wild creatures we saw were harmless. There were deer and rabbits and parrots and pheasantlike birds, at which Vicho threw stones in an effort to get us some fresh meat.

In spite of not having slept for thirty hours or more he walked far in advance of the guide and myself, as if he wore seven-league boots. We would hear him singing lustily or calling back to us. Only once did we hear his voice behind us, and I was half-convinced that it was a trick of ventriloquism until he caught up and explained that he had been chasing a rabbit up a hill.

Early in the afternoon we came to the most beautiful river I have ever seen. We learned that it was called the Rio Hondo (Deep River)—a well-deserved name, for Mexican rivers usually dash down the mountains in shallow cascades, while this one took time to fill serene pools whose depth was greater than could be guessed by looking down into its sunshot clarity. Fishes could be seen lazing in the transparent deeps as clearly as in an aquarium. Here and there the water bubbled between white boulders like liquid moonstones.

Vicho and I undressed and swam for nearly two hours in a pool that was forty feet long and deep enough to dive into from a shelf in the rocky cliff side fifteen or twenty feet high. Then we loafed in the sun on a beach whose sands glittered as if they were mixed with gold and probably were. All around us the

tropical foliage clothed the hills in a glorious tapestry of greens. Although we still had twenty miles to travel that day, we felt that we could loll and swim in this equatorial Eden forever.

When we started to dress Vicho discovered that his BVD's had blown into the river, and on recovering them he found a flea.

"Tie that," he exclaimed. "The damned thing is still alive."

The memory of that delicious plunge in the Rio Hondo cheered us through the rest of the day and especially during the dark night hours when our endurance seemed tested to the limit. Between physical fatigue and lack of sleep, I caught myself nodding in the saddle, while Vicho actually went to sleep as he walked and only woke when he stumbled and pitched headlong upon the ground.

It was after midnight when we came to Tequixistlán. Our entrance into the primitive Zapotecan village was greeted by the barking of hundreds of dogs and the braying of burros. It seemed that we passed for more than a mile between rude adobe huts standing starkly in the barren sand without coming to the town center. At last we saw a fire burning in an open kitchen and went to the house where an Indian and his woman were sleeping in a bed in the corridor. The man obligingly got up and guided us to the municipal palace.

Then he fetched the *presidente*, who offered to let us spend the night in a little hut attached to a pig sty. He further invited us to his house for a bowl of black coffee, and politeness demanded that we accept, but I left the amenities to Vicho and threw myself on the floor mat and almost instantly went to sleep.

In the morning we took a bus that ran to Tehuantepec, some thirty miles distant, over a fearful road deeply rutted by the rains. We feared that our teeth would be shaken loose before we reached the level plain, but here a new and more palpable danger awaited us. The dreaded Norther that sweeps the Isthmus of Tehuantepec at this season was blowing with gale force, bending the trees of the tropical forest like so much grass. Limbs and

whole trees snapped and fell across the road, making it necessary to stop every few minutes while the chauffeur and his helper and all the male passengers got out with machetes and cleared the way. Once we saw a spreading tree split three ways, as if the wind had struck with pile driver force from the sky. Often there was a tangle of *mala mujer* (bad woman) to clear away—a ticklish task, as this nettle is poisonous, although its roots are used to make a brew that is said to be a specific for syphilis. Broken branches of the *siete gotas* (seven drops) presented a sticky problem because they exuded pure rubber.

The bus did not enter Tehuantepec proper, as the river is spanned only by a steel railroad bridge, so we shouldered our luggage and walked.

Howling out of the north, the wind swept down the river in all its fury, filling the air with sand, and screaming through the steel girders of the bridge, shaking them as an angry child shakes a toy. And yet people were crossing on the leeward side. We even discerned dim naked figures bathing in sheltered curves of the river bank.

It was going to be a precarious undertaking to cross with our bulky equipment, and while we hesitated two pretty girls came toward us. Their full skirts were tied about their ankles to keep them from blowing, but the gusts lifted their short *buitas* and exposed glimpses of lovely sienna flesh and high firm breasts.

As they passed they laughed and shouted to us above the storm:

"*Cuidado, bueros!*" (Take care, blond ones!)

We saw that we would have to be on guard, not only against the wind, but the women in Tehuantepec.



## XXII: BEAUTIFUL BATHERS

TEHUANTEPEC'S history is fascinating, but not half so fascinating as its women. For a painter, at least, no other background need exist than the sensuous decoration of the tropics—the graceful coco palms and dancing sunshine—in which are echoed the flowing lines of beauty and the sunny charm of the Tehuanas. The unique and peculiar attraction of Tehuantepec lies in the extreme sophistication with which the women costume themselves for the street, and the utter naïveté with which they bathe naked with the men in the river. Dressed they are the most un-Indian Indians in Mexico; but they discard civilized inhibitions with their clothes and become as their ancestors before the Conquest.

The Norther continued to blow, though with abated force, day after day, until we got used to going about in the wind and flying sand. But while our hair, eyes, and ears got full of sand and even our teeth crunched on fine particles of it and we felt gritty all over, there was no such thing as a bath in Tehuantepec except in the river. And there the wind and sand were at their worst, so that almost everyone stayed away.

That old adage about its being an ill wind that blows nobody good proved true, however, for the Norther cooled the air and drove away the mosquitoes. Tehuantepec is on the low coastal plain of the Pacific and in normal weather is afflicted with the banes as well as the blessings of low tropical lands.

But if the Tehuanas did not go to the river, they flocked as usual to the market, which is an everyday affair. They came like colorful caryatids, bearing on their prim heads painted *jicalpextles* (large *jícaras*, or gourd bowls) filled with marigolds and immense purple *crestas*, or cock's combs. A whole corner of the great covered market was massed with these purple and gold blooms destined as gay offerings to the dead. They would be placed on household altars and on graves when the spirits of the departed returned during the first two days of November to spend a sort of Old Home Week with their living kin.

The Tehuanas themselves were like exotic flowers, and as they moved together in groups and separated on their various errands they made a kaleidoscope of color throughout the market. All the younger women wore the same style of dress—a full skirt that touched the ground and a short square *buipil*, the predominating color of the one being blue and of the other red and yellow. Many wore the ubiquitous black Mexican *reboso* draped over their heads, setting off their cameo-like features.

Their long black hair, which was dusted with a fine gold by the wind storm, was braided with bright-hued ribbons tied in rosettes at the end and then wound about the head like a chaplet. The ordinary *buiviles* were decorated with machine-stitched designs, but the finer ones were richly embroidered by hand with floral patterns. It was the same with the skirts. Some were simple cotton prints, while others were of silk, handsomely embroidered and very frou-frou, with tiers of fine lace and a starched white flounce at the bottom, called an *olan*.

It would seem like gilding the lily to add anything to this costume, which appears to have been created by an inspired Hollywood designer for a fancy dress ball, but when the Te-

huanas array themselves for a special fiesta they put on an astounding headdress known as the *buipil grande*. This regal decoration, which somewhat resembles the feathered headdresses worn by the Indian chieftains of our Southwest, is in reality nothing more or less than a child's frock with starched pleats around the neck, hem, and on the short sleeves.

There is a legend that a supply of the dresses was washed ashore from a wreck. The Tehuanas were as fascinated as they were mystified by them. Necks cut for little girls would not go on over a grown woman's head, but the lace ruffle made a lovely frame for the face. An even more striking effect was obtained by draping the hem over the head so that the flounce stood out around the face and fell in a foamy cascade down the back. So the delighted Tehuanas evolved a gorgeous headdress from the little frock and still wear it on important feast days. They have kept it exactly like the original model, even to the useless sleeves, although these are made without openings and are starched and ironed out flat.

Gold coins, in the eyes of the Tehuanas, have not a monetary, but an ornamental, value. They make them into earbobs, bracelets, and necklaces, and it is not uncommon to see a rich Tehuana displaying five hundred dollars in gold currency in the form of jewelry.

While the Tehuanas are fiercely proud of their Zapotec blood and speak their native idiom almost entirely, their dress, as beautiful and becoming as it is to them, is Indian merely by adaptation. The only Indian touch that has been retained is the *buipil*, and this has been so transformed by Spanish needlework and machine stitching as to have lost much of its native character. Only the older women go back to the straight wrap-around skirt and plain *buipil* of pre-Cortesian times.

Giggling girls gathered around me wherever I stationed myself to sketch the marketers passing and repassing with chickens dangling upside down at arm's length or with shallow market baskets and gourd trays held against the hips. These painted

gourd *jícaras*, they told me, were not made locally but came from Tuxtla in Chiapas.

There were many strange foods offered for sale—little bundles of chopped-up sugar cane; balls of crude brown panela that tastes like maple sugar, wrapped in dried cane leaves; powdered red *achiote* seeds for coloring candy, and dried seeds and okra, which they call *café extranjero* because it is used as a substitute for coffee.

Everyone spoke in Zapotec, but I noticed their speech differed from that of Yalalag in the addition of vowels to the end of words (such as *neesá*—water—instead of *nees*) showing corruption from contact with Spanish-speaking Mexicans and foreigners. The fairness of many of the Tehuanas also indicates that the race had been kept less pure than in the sierra. And in the heat of bargaining they often showered each other with the vilest epithets in the Spanish profane dictionary.

The vendors sat hunched up on tiny chairs, their slim brown feet peeping like mice from under the ruffles of their *olans*. Babies crept up under their mother's conveniently loose *buijpiles* to suck, while slightly older children played at store in imitation of their elders.

While I sketched, Vicho—who created the usual furor with his blondness and home-made hair oil (several women asked him what he used)—went about taking snapshots, which were all to prove blanks because the shutter of his camera was so full of sand that it did not work properly. But the one man in the market place—the rent collector—spotted him and thought he saw a chance to make an extra quinto (five centavos).

"You will have to pay fi," he told Vicho.

"What's fi?" Vicho asked.

"Don't you understand English? One, two, three, four, fi."

"Oh," said Vicho. "And how much will you pay me for taking your picture?"

The women who seemed to understand their dialogue, which

was mostly in Spanish, laughed heartily, and the discomfited rent collector beat a hasty retreat.

During these days we made excursions into the country wherever the roads were passable in antiquated little buses, which required an assistant as well as a driver because they broke down so often. All tropical villages bear a pealike resemblance to each other, with their refuse-littered streets infested by hogs, domestic fowls, dogs, and burros and scavenged by the sun and the *sopilotes*. But Salina Cruz—the port—was different.

This once prosperous port, built at tremendous expense by the English when they put through the railway across the Isthmus in 1908, has the look of modernity despite its premature decay. Under the magic wand of commerce it grew rapidly from a fishing village of six huts to a city of six thousand. Eighteen trains a day entered the station. Ships flying every flag brought cargoes to the harbor, protected from the heavy surf by a mile-long breakwater. The wharves, steel warehouses, and gigantic cranes represented the most up-to-date facilities. The dry dock in the inner harbor was one of the finest in the world.

But its prosperity was short-lived. The building of the Panama Canal spelled its doom. Mazatlan's only rival port on the Pacific coast of Mexico sank back to nothingness. The disused cranes rusted, the empty warehouses fell into decay, the harbor filled with sand.

Now, however, under the stimulus of war conditions, it was stirring to life again. Mexico, in the hope of finding an export market in the Far East for its appropriated oil, was making an effort—although it seemed a feeble one—to reopen the port.

Some of the warehouses had been reconditioned, and we saw a dredge in the inner harbor, but these indications of renewed activity could hardly be described as bustling. We were told that the dredge had been at work in the harbor for two years without clearing it. Investigation, it was said, disclosed that it had been built merely as a training ship and not for real operations. As for the oil for the lamps of China (via Japan) we were



told that Mexico expected Japan not only to come and get it, but to build the pipe line down to the port, a risky venture the cautious Japanese had not yet seen their way clear to undertaking.

Salina Cruz lies in a barren basin surrounded by hills covered with gigantic cactus and stunted trees. It depends entirely upon Tehuantepec for food supplies and even water. If these supplies were to be cut off for forty-eight hours, famine would exist.

The Norther was blowing so strongly that when we walked out on the breakwater we could hardly stand against it. As the huge breakers piled in on the beach the wind decapitated their crests and blew them back to sea in smoky puffs.

One side of the harbor was protected by a big headland upon which still stands the lighthouse built by Cortes—a silent reminder of his many ill-fated attempts to build a fleet with which to conquer new lands.

At last the Norther blew itself out and Vicho and I took soap and towels and went down to the river to bathe. All Tehuantepec seemed to have the same idea.

It was like a pagan holiday. Men and women and children, naked and unashamed, darkened the banks of the broad, rain-swollen river for miles. Though, as a gesture toward segregation, the sexes did not mix freely, they were in full view of each other and passed each other constantly without embarrassment.

On the bank near the town, dogs, barking and snapping, chased the pigs around the garbage dumps. The swiftest dog was one with an amputated hind leg.

As we made our way up the river we passed women doing the week's washing on wooden scrubbing boards. Every bush was covered with colorful laundry hung to dry. Other women were soaping their shapely bodies and shampooing their luxuriant hair, which was as wavy as the sea. Girls with firm up-pointed breasts ran along the bank, jumped into the water and paddled in the shallows with great splashing, shouting, and laughter.

When we paused so that I could make a rough sketch they mocked us in chorus, shouting:

*"Trompas de hule! Trompas de hule!"*

This expression is the equivalent of rubber-neck, but the literal translation would be rubber-snouts.

Moving on, we saw an oxcart with a big iron oil drum backed into the water. Two naked boys were filling it with muddy river water by means of gourd basins, playfully taking their time about it, while the oxen, one white and one black, stood knee-deep in the shoals, dreaming whatever inconsequential dreams oxen have. Near by men were filling Standard Oil tins with the water and loading them on the backs of burros, two cans on either side. In this way is Tehuantepec supplied with its drinking water, the well water being too alkaline for the purpose. To make the river water fit to drink, however, it is first filtered through unglazed earthenware vessels.

Across the river where there were no people, hundreds of black birds were bathing along the bank as eager to cleanse their wings of sand as humans their hair.

A man came down the river fishing with a cast net but with no better luck than if he had been trying to catch trout in a pail. Laughing boys whose dark golden bodies were as smooth and rounded as living statues of burnished copper, chased and wrestled each other on the pale golden sands. It seemed as though everything in nature were celebrating the lull in the wind by coming to the river to enjoy the cleansing waters, the gleaming sands, and the still sunshine.

Vicho and I continued for all of a mile up the river until we came to a place where men and boys were bathing. We had brought bathing trunks in our luggage, but how improper they would have been here! Following the custom of the country, we stripped to the buff, but somehow white bodies seem naked where brown ones are merely nude.

The Indians are beautiful with their smooth skins in all the earth tints from golden ochre to burnt sienna. Language is a

poor medium to express the beauty of their bodies. Anyone who has looked attentively upon a woman's back or breasts knows how many charming curves there are for which we lack half the indispensable terms. How can words describe all the harmonious golden tints that effect the transition from skin to hair? To express such beauty one must paint or go mad. But if I were to remain long in Tehuantepec I believe I should have to become a sculptor, for sculpture has all the reality that anything entirely unreal can possess. It casts a shadow and can be touched. It differs from reality mainly in that it is harder and does not speak—two rather minor defects!

The rains in the distant mountains had raised the river, and it tumbled down the valley in a brown flood. Just above where we bathed the waters leaped and bounded over the stones in a swift rapids. Then they rushed headlong into a deep channel, wide and deceptively placid-looking. The boys, who were all strong swimmers, thought it good sport to wade up to the foot of the rapids, plunge into the deep current and swim with all speed to the opposite bank. If they reached it without being carried fifty feet downstream they considered it a victory.

Vicho and I found it fun for a while. We also amused ourselves by floating for a distance. There is a dreamlike, magic-carpet sensation in being borne effortlessly upon the current of a stream. Each time we were tempted to go a little farther.

Once as I floated past the place where Vicho was sitting on the beach, I called to him:

"See you in Salina Cruz!"

But the express speed of the current soon made it appear less of a joke than I intended. I saw that I was being swept down to where the women were bathing. Turning over on my stomach I began swimming frantically for shore. But I had not counted on the broadening of the channel. When I tried to get to my feet I could not touch bottom. Every second carried me farther downstream. In a minor panic I swam with all the power I could muster. Again I tried to stand. This time I succeeded, although

it was almost too deep to keep my footing. To make it harder, the stones on the bottom were rolling. The bed of the river was moving like a tread mill. In spite of my efforts I seemed to stand still. The pounding of the powerful current beat the wind from my lungs. I felt on the point of exhaustion. I had a wild impulse to call for help, but when I looked toward shore I saw the men and women laughing at my struggles. Summoning my strength in a last desperate effort I half-swam, half-lunged to shoal water. There I regained my breath and poise and waded back to where Vicho was sunning himself unconcernedly in the sand.

"Current pretty swift?" he asked.

"Yes," I admitted. "For a moment it had me scared."

"Are you sure it was the current and not the women that scared you?" he laughed.

I wonder.



### XXIII: MERRYMAKING WITH THE DEAD

ON November 1 in Tehuantepec and throughout Mexico the Indians celebrated the Day of the Little Dead by decorating the children's graves and inviting their spirits to feast with them in their homes, where the altars were decked with flowers and offerings of food. But the chief celebration took place on the second—the Day of the Big Dead.

All day long people went by the scores to the graveyard, the women and girls carrying *jicalpextles* brimming over with cock's combs and marigolds, the flowers of the dead. They were dressed in rich-colored silks and velvets, lavishly encrusted with silk embroidery, and deep snowy *olans*, while the men wore their brightest pink shirts left hanging outside their clean white *calzones* and their special dress hats of heavy felt. These are usually of a gray tone and embellished with silver-thread embroidery, and are known both as *sombreros de plomo* (lead hats) because of their leadlike weight, or *sombreros de venti-quatro* (twenty-four-peso hats) because they originally cost twenty-four pesos.

I was fascinated by these sombreros and asked one man to let me examine his.

"I have had it for thirty years," he told me proudly.

"Thirty years!" I exclaimed.

"Sí, señor," he said. "It is practically brand new. These hats are made to last a lifetime."

There was no need to ask the way to the graveyard. We were carried there in a current of flower scent and color that flowed through the narrow crooked streets and out into the country. As we passed the houses we glanced in through the open doors at the profusely decorated altars.

Tehuantepec, with its white houses, tile roofs supported by masonry pillars, romantic balconies, grilled windows, and hidden *patios*, its many churches and plazas filled with tamarind trees, is a typical Spanish town, although it is said that no Spaniards live there. Among its fifteen thousand inhabitants there are only about three hundred white Mexicans, a sprinkling of Syrian merchants, and one American with an Indian wife. Some of the Tehuanos are white, but the line is not drawn by blood so much as by speech and dress. As the individual chooses, so is he.

For some strange reason that we were never able to figure out, unless it is to discourage burros or drunks, the sidewalks of the town are elevated three or four feet above the street. They are stepped at the corners and usually along the sides.

But the most curious fact about Tehuantepec is that, while its history antedates the coming of the Spaniards by many centuries, no trace can be seen of its native antiquity. Originally a Huave city, before it was conquered successively by the Zapotecs and Aztecs, it was the principal city of the Isthmus in 1497, when Cosijopii ruled as the King of Tehuantepec.

The main part of the town is built upon the terraced slope of a hill called by the Zapotecs Dani Guibidchi (Tiger Hill) and by the Aztecs, Teh, from which the present name of Tehuantepec is derived. This hill was formerly the lair of tigers, or jaguars, which preyed on the inhabitants.

Later we climbed to the top of the hill and looked out over a rich agricultural region, the principal products of which are the Spanish plum, piñon, orange, mango, coconut, sugar cane, pineapple, tamarind, mucilage, beans, and corn. The tamarind has a long beanlike pod from which a refreshing soft drink is made, while the mucilage tree has a yellow blossom which is succeeded by a large white berry whose juice produces mucilage. There is no agrarian problem, as every Indian has his own plot of ground.

Long before we reached the graveyard we heard music, or rather a weird mingling of dissonant musical sounds. On arriving, we found that they were produced by three bands of wind instruments all playing different pieces at the same time.

The entrance to the graveyard was like that to a fair. This impression was produced not only by the flower carriers with their calcined faces and gaudy skirts blowing against their supple swaying figures and the men in their gala attire, but by the numerous vendors of cakes and hot and cold drinks who had set up their stands on either side of the great arched gateway. The crowds, music, refreshments, flowers, fragrance, costumes, and movement combined to create an air of festivallike merrymaking at odd variance to the sepulchral setting.

Every grave was a mound of gold and purple blossoms. And still the devoted relatives of the dead kept coming with their gay offerings in a steady stream through all the daylight hours. Many of the women had little grass brooms with which to sweep the stones and make the graves tidy.

Several thousand people were gathered not only to pay honor to, but to visit with, their dead. The dead were invisible to me, so I cannot report on how the Tehuanos dress in the other world. But the brilliant costumes of the living and the glowing heaps of flowers contrasted against the swept white gravestones and tombs made the most colorful scene I had yet witnessed in Mexico.

A mother sat on the flower-bedecked grave of her dead child nursing her latest born. Families went about in groups, visiting

with each other as well as with the departed. They were cheery and smiling, as at a homecoming. But now and again memories or grief would cause a widow or recently bereft mother to burst into tears, and one of the three small bands would go at once to her side to dispel her sadness with lively airs.

As I wandered about I was thankful that I had shoes, for I noticed how often the women and girls stooped to pluck burrs from their bare feet. I came to a newly opened grave about which a few people were standing and staring vacantly. I too stared and saw on the floor of the grave an old pair of shoes. A skeleton would not have been half so gruesome or pathetic.

"Why have they opened this grave?" I asked a man standing near me.

"*Pos, quien sabe, señor?*" he said. "Perhaps the rental had expired."

"But in that case, what have they done with the bones?"

"Ah, the bones. They are in this heap of earth."

Of all disposessions for nonpayment of rent, this struck me as the most cruel. To have your very bones thrown out of their last resting place on the one day of the year set aside for remembering the dead!

After a while I grew tired and looked about for a place to rest. Seeing a neglected grave, I went over to it and sat down. I had no thought of the effect of my action, but I soon became aware that people were looking at me. Some were staring at me in surprise, others in sympathy. Suddenly I realized what was in their minds. Perhaps if I had seemed sad the band would have come and played to me.

Then I looked at the old headstone and started. It was the grave of an American from Virginia who had died in Tehuantepec in 1898. Now I got the whole story—the long neglected grave . . . the relative who had made a pilgrimage from America to find the place where one dear to him had been buried. . . . How sad (or strange) that he had brought no flowers with him. . . .

Yes, it was sad. The dead man was not my kin, but he was my



countryman. He belonged to me. I would gladly have placed flowers on his grave. But of the thousands of blooms around me there was not one that could be plucked or purchased. And I was hanged if I would walk to town and back.



## XXIV: THE SANDUNGA

**M**AYORDOMÍAS are forbidden by law, but Mexican law has not a very long arm and old customs are hard to suppress.

What is a *mayordomía*? That was what we wanted to find out. The chance seemed to offer when we heard of one in San Blas. But the Mexicans who boarded at Doña Carmen's where we were staying advised us to keep out of San Blas.

"Why?" we asked.

"It is very dangerous," they said. "A den of cutthroats."

"But there is a *mayordomía* there."

"Worse still," they said shaking their heads ruefully. "Everyone will be drunk and you will be lucky not to get a knife in your backs."

We did not disregard their advice because we were looking for trouble, but because we had learned to take such warnings with a large pinch of salt. While the Indians often get quarrelsome when they get drunk, they are not apt to molest a white stranger without due cause. And since our attitude was entirely

friendly—our sole desire being to study their customs and manners—we did not anticipate danger to ourselves.

The same sandy street connects Tehuantepec with San Blas, but as we proceeded we seemed to leave civilization behind. Delightful adobe houses with glimpses of flowery *patios* rising above each other among the trees of the terraced Tiger Hill, gave way to walled huts of *carrizo* stalks standing starkly on the barren sandy ground. The only growing thing we saw was an occasional mighty *ceiba*, which the Indians call *pochutle* and worship as the spirit of growth. While the people wore the Tehuano costume, their features were darker and more truly Indian.

The Norther was blowing fiercely again. In Tehuantepec we narrowly missed being struck by flying roof tiles, while in San Blas the wind-blown sand stung our faces and eyes and occasional gusts made us stagger.

We were directed to the house where the *mayordomía* was being held by the sound of dance music. A crowd of men all wearing their jaunty *sombreros de venti-cuatro* were standing about the entrance. It was a very big house with a great enclosed patio both of which were built entirely of *carrizo* stalks.

The owner of the house, who was also the *mayordomo*, invited us in, but we found that it was a dutch-treat affair, all the guests being expected to put fifty centavos or what they could into an earthenware bowl. The cashier entered the donation after each name. He wrote in his ledger: Vicho and Addison . . . one peso.

They told us that the money thus raised was put into a charity fund for the good of the community, but our Mexican friends at Doña Carmen's laughed when we told them this and said that it was used to buy more meat and mescal and that the fiesta continued so long as there was enough money left in the kitty.

There were over two hundred men, women, and children inside the enclosure. The musicians sat on chairs under the dark porch, roofed by wattled boughs covered with leaves, and the women squatted on the ground around the outdoor kitchen where the

huge pots of stew and coffee were bubbling and filling the air with appetizing odors. We were seated at a table with eight other men. While we were protected from the wind, we were aware of its force, as every now and then the windward wall of the patio would sway inward as if a herd of elephants had suddenly leaned against it.

Our host was very solicitous about seeing that our jiggers were kept filled with raw mescal—a gullet-searing maguey brandy which we were obliged to drink without benefit of a chaser—and that we were plentifully supplied with Tigre cigarettes—one of the cheapest Mexican brands.

A *mayordomo*, we now learned, was a person who is elected for a year and whose function consists in paying for the mass said on the village saint's day, in providing candles, food, drink, and tobacco for the musicians and in reimbursing those who slaughter an animal, put up cash, make candles, or decorate the house. He is expected to make a strict accounting of every donation, as he must make an equivalent return when the donor is conducting a *mayordomía*. This barter-banking account is meticulously kept in ledgers.

We had supposed that San Blas was a *barrio* or ward of Tehuantepec, but when we asked about this, all of the men at our table declared vehemently that their village was an independent entity. They expressed great scorn for the Tehuanos. During the war of independence in 1810, they told us, Tehuantepec remained loyal to Spain, whereas San Blas supported the revolution. In recognition of its patriotism it was made a separate municipality, and has proudly remained so.

At length the feast was served—bowls of greasy stew and stacks of *totopos*, the *tortillas* of the Isthmus which are as full of holes as a colander. We ate like the natives, drinking from the bowls and fishing out the meat and vegetables with pieces of *totopo*. They told us that a full-grown bull had been slaughtered to make the stew. It was good food, but the combination of fat

and mescal, as I feared, gave me a bad case of dysentery the next day.

The women served us and then sat about watching us eat, custom forbidding them to eat or to drink. We were told, however, that there would be plenty left over for them to take home. The dogs were more fortunate. They went about snapping up bones and scraps and snapping at each other.

The feasting concluded, we were taken to the head table to meet the *presidente* and the board of *principales*, of whom there were a dozen or more. This meant polite speeches back and forth and more mescal and Tigre cigarettes.

One of the men rolled a native cigarette for me. The wrapper was ordinary white paper and the filling may have been marijuana for all I know. I took one puff for politeness's sake, and then waited until no one seemed to be looking and substituted a Tigre. But a young man, who had taken an obvious dislike to Vicho and myself, was sitting at the table, and my little deception did not skip his notice. He snatched the cigarette from my hand and showed it to the *presidente*.

"Look!" he cried. "Is that the cigarette you gave him?"

But the *presidente's* face became like a mask.

"Yes," he said.

"Look again," said the troublemaker. "What does it say on it?"

"Nothing," replied the *presidente*.

The man sitting on my left said to me:

"Pay no attention to that fellow. He is a *ladino* and does not belong in San Blas. Nobody likes him."

Just then the musicians began to play the *Sandunga*. I turned around to watch, but the man on my left said:

"You must not turn your back on the *presidente* unless you wish to insult him."

There seemed no solution to this problem of etiquette but to beg permission to change my seat.

The first couple on the floor were the new *mayordomo*, who

had been elected for the coming year, and his wife. They were greeted by a round of applause. Then other elderly couples followed. The young girls, as was proper, at first giggled and refused.

Drifting out onto the floor apart the dancers slowly began moving their feet in a vague waltz step. The women, sedate as old duchesses, lifted their ruffles, flirted shyly with old beaux, and moved back and forth in a dreamy impersonal rhythm. The dancers kept about three feet apart and scarcely looked at each other, although each knew what the other was doing. There were five movements and then the rhythm changed for each. Often the man risked a few extra steps with the heel and toe, but the women never lost their air of queenly aloofness. Now and again the dancers would cross, turn and face again, or one would go in back of the other. But whatever the one did seemed to be a matter of complete indifference to the other.

Certain effeminate young men danced together and, when the music stopped, went off holding hands. It was the first time I had ever noticed signs of sexual perversion among the Indians, whose lack of inhibitions would seem to discourage that sort of abnormality. But apparently many of the young Indians in the villages, who drift into the professions of barbering and tailoring, find life complex and morally confusing.

"Why don't you dance?" we were often asked. "Are you afraid?"

I am not sure whether they meant afraid of not being able to master the steps, or of arousing jealousy among the men. But Vicho was not afraid of either, and when the next dance started he chose the comeliest and most sought-after girl for his partner.

As she stepped out on the floor with him, all the others watched her with envy. And while she danced and lifted her ruffles to the slow rhythm of the hot country step, she dimpled and beamed as though it were the proudest moment of her life. Vicho picked up the steps with surprising ease and seemed to be enjoying the dance as well as the effect he was creating.

But they had not been dancing long before the *ladino* trouble-

maker cut in. Nettled by his rebuff over the cigarette, he was doubtless seeking a second chance to start something.

It was another mistake. Neither Vicho nor the girl wanted to be interrupted, especially by a fellow who had already made himself obnoxious. But the *ladino* stood on his right to cut in and tried to push Vicho aside. Moving quickly, Vicho caught the fellow's wrist and paralyzed it with a trick of jiu-jitsu.

The girl started to return to her seat. But on being released, the *ladino* pursued her and grabbed her by the arm. She turned on him like a tiger cat and would probably have clawed his eyes out if several men and women had not come to his rescue and dragged her off.

This was not the first scuffle. The mescal that had flowed so freely was having its effect. Fights broke out between men as between dogs, only the men fought silently, soddenly, staggering toward each other, sending tables crashing, swinging heavy blows that looped around one another's necks and ending up in a heap on the floor.

The *presidente* urged us to leave, and I went out with him, thinking that Vicho was following. But when I gained the street I saw that he had not come. At first this did not alarm me, but when some minutes passed without his appearing I feared he might be in trouble. Suspecting that we had been purposely separated, I hurried back.

I met Vicho coming out. He said the women were astonished at my leaving him alone and told him I had gone.

"Weren't you afraid of the men ganging up on you?" I asked.

"No," he laughed. "If it came to that I could have counted on the women."

It may seem strange for me to say, after describing the riotous color of Tehuantepec, that I was still unsatisfied in my quest for color in Mexico. But this is because it was not the sort of color I sought. It was the color of theatrical dresses which are not of ancient Indian origin, and the fortuitous color of a flowery fiesta.

It must be remembered, too, that the men of Tehuantepec are prismatic nonentities. There was color only in the gatherings of women: the community itself was colorless. So I decided to continue my quest for rainbow hues as far as the border. We packed our luggage again and set off for the state of Chiapas.











## XXV: TRIP TO TUXTLA

TEHUANTEPEC station was alive with people waiting for the 6 A.M. train for Ixtepec and points south. It was like the start of a picnic. Women were selling painted wooden figurines of Tehuanas with *jicalpextles* on their heads, others were opening water coconuts for sale, while still others had set up tiny kitchens with oil-can braziers and were serving hot coffee and sweet buns. There were peeled oranges in baskets and *tortillas* in gaily striped serving cloths. There were heaps of perforated red clay pots used for washing corn, and griddles of the same material for toasting the *tortillas*. And there was a bright array of luggage, colorfully dyed sisal nets, and painted straw shopping bags. The train arrived on time, and the rainbow luggage was distributed on the racks, seats, and on the floor.

We were in Ixtepec at the end of an hour, and there changed to the train for Chiapas.

Mexican towns change-their names with chameleonlike willfulness. A little while ago Ixtepec was called San Geronimo. The station in Chiapas, where we were to leave the train, was known until recently as Jalisco, but is now named Arriaga.

Even Yalalag may be known before long as Villa Hidalgo. But God forbid!

At every station for as long as we traveled on the Isthmus, pretty women, dressed in the Tehuana costume, met the train selling good things to eat. It was a pageant of beauty as well as a continuous feast.

Our traveling companions were nearly all Zapotec Indians. They spoke in their own tongue and the only Spanish we heard during most of the trip were the words with which the idiom is sprinkled. But at one of the stations an American boarded the train and, spotting us at once for his countrymen, came over to say hello.

He gave his name as Johnson—Scandinavian Johnson—and said that he had spent most of his life in Mexico. Like the Chivo, whom he knew, he was a prospector. He had recently abandoned a rich gold mine because the Indians in the district had refused to work in it and had threatened to kill him if he remained. A friend, he said, was attempting to reopen the mine with the aid of soldiers, but he doubted if the man would come out alive. As for himself, he was now starting up a fishing business on the shores of one of the two great lagoons on the coast of Chiapas. He left us at a little station to return to his lonely field of work.

Arrived at Arriaga, we were beset by taxi drivers who wanted twenty-five pesos a passenger for the three-hour drive over the mountains to Tuxtla, the state capital. But we found that we could get a bus for seven-fifty.

The climb began at once, for the mountains rise in a wall from the plain. Soon we were high above the clean, white, but dull city of Arriaga and the tropical plains of Soconusco, where the little trains run back and forth along the hem of the lofty blue ranges.

After a time we reached the top of the mountain wall and entered an immense sparsely inhabited plateau. From time to time we passed rude little Indian villages with big revolutionary names, such as Tierra y Independencia, but at dusk we came to

a considerable town called Cinjalapa, where we made a brief halt. Here we learned of a species of cotton which protects itself from the boll weevil by forming a tissue around the egg, which the weevil has deposited in the boll, and smothering it. The cotton plant also has a natural protector in a small jumping spider which weaves a web over the bud.

We rode in the dark the rest of the distance to Tuxtla, where we went to the principal hotel. All the rooms had been pre-empted by those who came by car, but the owner put two cots in his private parlor for us.

He stared when Vicho wrote in the register "Vicho y Addison, Yalalag." "You will both have to sign," he said. But he shrugged and let it pass when Vicho told him he *had* signed for each of us.

The parlor was furnished in the height of Mexican mid-Victorian elegance, with French wall paper, what-nots, bric-a-brac, a jaguar rug complete with head, dust catchers, look-at-the-pretty-birdie family photographs, and a carved mahogany mirror stand with a garden of perennial paper roses blooming at its base. There was also a player piano covered with the gaudiest of Mexican serapes and souvenirs, the only frontier touch being a service automatic in a chased leather holster and a cartridge belt, fully supplied.

After living in rooms furnished with only the bare necessities, we could hardly breathe amid all this luxuriance of interior decoration that accounted for every square inch of floor and wall space. We thought, however, it would be all right when we turned out the light. But as we were about to go to sleep a family of crickets in a pile of music rolls by the head of Vicho's cot awoke and chirruped in their most strident tones. Finally he could not stand it, and spent the rest of the night in a relentless effort to exterminate the last of the unwelcome serenaders.

In the morning we found that Tuxtla, for all its remoteness, was a modern-looking town of about twelve thousand inhabitants situated in a valley no more than two thousand feet above sea level. The architecture was as dull as a business ledger and the

mestizo dress of the people as unpicturesque as a stovepipe. Discouraged by our first look at the place, we tried to find out from the hotel keeper what the other towns in the state were like.

"Tuxtla is the finest city in Chiapas," he declared. "The rest are mere Indian villages."

This assurance that we would find no more fine cities like the capital renewed our hope, and we visited the market as the best place to get a line on the Indian villages from the vendors and their products. But apparently the Indians do not come down to Tuxtla. We saw only the Indian women from near-by Chiapa de Corzo, who wear a low-necked blouse with black-and-white hand-woven neck and sleeve bands and lace collars lavishly embroidered with colored silk flowers. Their dress is pretty but not primitive. We had heard that the natives still used cocoa beans as money, but when we bought some cocoa beans and offered them in place of coins we could only buy merry laughter.

Tuxtla is in the center of a rich cattle and agricultural country, famous for its cheeses, fine horses, and double-eared corn. Other crops for which the region is noted are anise, henequen, chick peas, native melons, and tobacco. Its chief manufactures are earthenware vessels, painted gourds, fireworks, religious sculpture, and cigarettes. The women make starch by an ancient and original process.

The market having failed to give us the key to the Indian life of Chiapas, we went to the museum. This is housed in a huge hall containing a few archaeological relics and thousands of old books.

"Have you a good book on Chiapas?" I asked the librarian.

"The library has never been catalogued," he said. "But I am sure you will find one if you care to look."

We thought it would be simpler to go the rounds of the book stores first. In one of them we succeeded in finding the legend of the Sumidero, the epic story of the conquest of Chiapas.



## XXVI: LEGEND OF THE SUMIDERO

**L**UYÁ was the high priestess of the Chiapas Indians. She alone could hear the omnipotent word of Tamagostad, greatest of the gods.

Luyá it was who led the great tribal migration from Uruguay; Luyá who designated the place on the wide banks of the Nandechía River as the site for the temple pyramids and palaces of Nandiumé; Luyá who chose the bold cliff at the entrance to the Sumidero, a gorge in which the Nandechía seems to be swallowed up, as the council rock of the warriors.

Luyá interpreted life, secrets, and the outcome of battle. And Luyá had said:

"The great Tamagostad, god of gods, commands me to warn you that a strange people from the unknown are coming to conquer our lands and enslave our people."

Whereupon King Nandalumi summoned his chiefs and warriors to a council on the cliff above the Sumidero. And when all were assembled, Luyá spoke:

"The strangers are strong and valiant and bear arms that cause death in a different form from that caused by our lances and



arrows. But Tamagostad bids you fight to the death rather than lose your liberty."

Having spoken, Luyá accompanied by twelve virgins, mounted the pyramid where stood the altar to Tamagostad and burned copal incense to the image of the god. On the floor of the altar, as an offering for victory, were heaped the skulls of the chiefs of conquered tribes.

The power of the Chiapanecans had been spread largely through the wisdom and courage of their chief warrior Nacayolá, but more recently by his valiant and best-loved son, Nangularí.

Nangularí, who had the physical beauty of a young god, went dressed in a cloak woven of the plumes of the freedom-loving quetzal bird and wore a golden diadem upon his brow. Already he was master of twenty tribes.

Countless tales were told of his valor. Once while unarmed he was attacked by a great jaguar, which he killed with his bare hands. Another time he saved a Zapotec slave boy from the jaws of a crocodile by a well-aimed arrow. And his latest exploit was the rescue of a maiden from the coils of a poisonous snake, which he tore from her body with his hands and finished with a blow of his obsidian sword.

And when Nangularí called upon his warriors to defend their liberty to the death, they loosed a flight of arrows into the air and, executing a wild dance, cried "Long live our brave chief, the favorite son of Chiapas and of Nacayolá!"

And then the trumpeters sounded the war call on their conch shell trumpets, awaking the echoes of the vast valley and the patriotism of the people whose lands were threatened. When night fell signal fires of flaming pitch pine were kindled on top of every hill to summon the warriors to Nandiumé.

All night the warriors, armed with their jaguar-hide shields, quilted cotton armor, double-edged obsidian swords, lances and bows and arrows, poured into Nandiumé seeking their chiefs. With the dawn Nangularí, the rosy light shining on his iri-

descent cloak of plumes, led his legions forth to meet the audacious invaders from the unknown.

Before long they came upon the enemy. Nangularí stared in astonishment upon the little group of bearded white men riding strange beasts at the head of a great horde of Zapotec and Nahoá allies. Their leader was stout-hearted Captain Marín, who with only twenty-seven horsemen, sixty foot soldiers, and eight small cannon dared to threaten the powerful empire of Chiapas.

Nangularí drew his long bow until it seemed about to break and aimed an arrow straight at Captain Marín's heart. Unerringly the shaft flew to its mark—and glanced off the steel as if by magic. But, undaunted, Nangularí cried to his followers:

"To the combat, brave Chiapanecans!"

Countless bows loosed a whistling cloud of arrows that darkened the sky and, with the fury of dauntless warriors, the Chiapanecans hurled themselves upon the foe, fighting man to man as was their custom. The Spaniards stood their ground in close formation, pointing the strange weapons which Luyá had seen in her vision. Lightning issued from their muzzles and spread death. A fearful cry went up among the Chiapanecans, who fled in terror.

Nangularí went among his demoralized men, rallying them and renewing their courage and sending them back into the battle with redoubled fury. They fought like demons throwing themselves upon the Spaniards, who huddled together, opposing a ring of steel to the onslaught of the half-naked Indians. Every warrior who was killed was replaced by a hundred more. Captain Marín encouraged his soldiers with the cry "*Santiago y España!*" But at length they reached the limit of human endurance and scarcely had the strength left to wield their swords.

The Chiapanecans were pressing their advantage when suddenly the cannon, which had been brought into place, were fired. Never before had the attacking Indians heard such thunder, which was as if the very skies were falling. The sound struck such

fear into their hearts that, with victory within their grasp, they dropped their weapons and abandoned the field.

Again King Nandalumi summoned his chiefs and warriors to a war council on the bluff above the Sumidero.

"These men from the unknown are like gods," said Nangularí. "They are invincible, for they know how to command the lightning and the thunder."

But Luyá stood before the council and said:

"Have I not told you how it would be? And have I not also told you that Tamagostad commands you to fight like men without fear?"

"How can men war with gods?" murmured the warriors.

"What will you then?" cried Luyá. "Will you submit like dogs? Will the proud people of Chiapas let themselves be ground under the heel of the invader? No! Far better to die as free men than to live as slaves. He whom Tamagostad protects need not fear. Tomorrow will Luyá lead the battle."

When the Indian allies of the Spaniards saw the Chiapanecans advance with the high priestess at their head, they trembled and were afraid. But Captain Marín chided the chiefs:

"What!" he mocked. "Are you afraid of a woman?"

"Luyá is no mere woman," they replied sullenly.

"We will see as to that," declared Captain Marín. "Whoever shall take Luyá prisoner shall be rewarded with land and slaves."

Word of this offer spread and both sides entered the combat even more fiercely than on the previous day.

Luyá seemed truly under the protection of a god, for though she exposed herself in the forefront of battle the arrows and bullets rained harmlessly about her. The great chief Nacayolá, father of Nangularí, and a band of picked warriors formed a guard around her. They bore the brunt of the fray. But one by one they were slain, and at last a ball found the heart of Nacayolá, who fell mortally wounded and was dragged away by some of his tribesmen. The enemy surged around Luyá and carried her off to Captain Marín.

"They tell me you are immortal," said the Spaniard.

"It is so," replied Luyá calmly.

"Cut off her head."

But no Indian dared approach Luyá, so great was her power even though a captive.

"Cut off her head," the captain commanded one of his own men.

The sword flashed; the deed was done.

"Now is she dead?" demanded the Spaniard of the Indians.

But the Indians stared, still unconvinced.

"Cut her body into a thousand pieces and throw them to her own people. Let them see the mortal end of the immortal Luyá."

When the Chiapanecans saw the horrible death that had befallen their revered high priestess, they believed that Tama-gostad had deserted them, and a terrible fear took possession of them. Again they dropped their arms and fled, not stopping this time until they had swum to safety to the other bank of the Nandechía River.

That night the Spaniards and their allies camped by the river across from their adversaries. Captain Marín sat at the foot of an oak tree, stroking his beard and pondering how to get his army to the opposite bank, for there was not a single *pirogue* to be had. Just then he heard a shot fired by one of his sentries and leaped to his feet, expecting a surprise attack. Instead, however, his men brought before him some Zapotec slaves who had escaped from the Chiapanecans and had brought twenty *pirogues* to enable the Spaniards to pursue the enemy.

With the first light of day the Spaniards and their allies, guided by the Zapotecs, crossed the river and fell upon the unsuspecting Chiapanecans. They were aided by an uprising of all the Zapotec slaves who attacked simultaneously from the rear. The Chiapanecans let loose hundreds of fierce dogs upon their former subjects, but finding themselves trapped between two fires, they were at last forced to flee, leaving a multitude of dead and wounded upon the battlefield.

For the third time the Chiapanecans assembled on the great cliff that guards the entrance to the gorge of the Sumidero. King Nandalumi had been killed in the last encounter with the Spaniards. Nacayolá had died defending Luyá, and Luyá herself was dead. Only Nangularí, the great bowman and valiant leader, remained, and the people now turned to him as their supreme chief.

Nangularí slowly mounted the steps of the altar built to Tamagostad, and, after burning an offering of copal incense, he raised aloft his arms and prayed aloud so that all the people might hear.

"Oh god Tamagostad, god of gods!  
 The only one whom we love with fervor,  
 Why hast thou martyred and destroyed my people  
 With such heartless cruelty?  
 See how I am left alone because all the brave chiefs,  
 Who fought with such valor, are now in hell.  
 We implored thee not to abandon us,  
 Not to permit the intrepid Spaniards to soil our honor  
 By forcing us to lose our arms,  
 For we cannot support their cruel domination.  
 If this is to be the fortune of my people,  
 And such are thy cruel designs,  
 It is better that we die in battle  
 Than live in servitude.  
 If all our sacrifices are useless,  
 Far better, O great Tamagostad!  
 That we seek death in the Sumidero  
 Than live without liberty!"

As Captain Marín at the head of his army approached the Sumidero, he heard a great cry from the cliff top and raising his eyes beheld the godlike figure of a young warrior silhouetted against the sky. One of his soldiers raised his gun, but before he could fire the figure leaped into space and plunged down into the boiling waters of the Nandechía River. Others followed—

men and children and women holding babies in their arms. The doughty Spaniard stood transfixed in horror and amazement as he watched an entire valiant race commit suicide for freedom.

Thus perished the Chiapanecans, but their name lives as a synonym of indomitable courage. Nandiumé became the present town of Chiapa and the region of the empire, the modern state of Chiapas, whose coat of arms, granted by the Crown of Spain, depicts the Sumidero.



## XXVII: BELLS AND BOATS

AS the town of Chiapa, settled by the former vassals of the martyred Chiapanecans on the site of Nandiumé and long known as Chiapa of the Indians, was only a half-hour's bus ride from Tuxtla, we went there the next day.

At the bridge over the river the bus was stopped by a soldier who inspected it for contraband alcohol. This river, which was called the Nandechía by the Chiapanecans, is now known as the Grijalva in honor of one of the conquistadors. It has its source in the Cuchumatanes mountains of Guatemala and its mouth on the coast of Tabasco, where its waters empty into the Gulf of Campeche. When Bartolomé de Las Casas journeyed to Chiapas in 1545 as the first bishop to occupy the see, he came by boat up the Grijalva as far as Chiapa of the Indians. The waters passing beneath the bridge were deep and swift, for it is at this point that the river enters the Huitepec mountains, although the majestic gorge of the Sumidero—said to be one of the greatest natural wonders of Mexico—is hidden away in the interior.

The road to Chiapa, while as yet unimproved, is part of the

Inter-American Highway which in a few years will bring countless tourists whizzing in their cars down to Guatemala. But up to the present few American travelers have ever come this way, so that we already felt ourselves to be pioneers in the Land of Tomorrow.

We entered Chiapa over an old stone bridge spanning a little tributary of the Grijalva. We caught a glimpse of naked bodies bathing in a pool as we sped on through the narrow cobbled streets between gaily painted one-story houses in the colonial style and came to a stop beneath a gnarled old *ceiba* tree in the immense plaza.

When Father Thomas Gage, the first Englishman to come to Spanish America, passed through Chiapa in 1625 on his flight from Mexico to Guatemala, he observed:

"Though Chiapa in the opinion of the Spaniards be held to be one of the poorest countries of America, because in it as yet there have been no mines discovered, nor golden sands found in the rivers, nor any haven upon the South Sea, whereby commodities are brought in and carried out, as to Mexico, Oaxaca and Guatemala, yet I may say it exceedeth most and yieldeth to none except it be to Guatemala; nay it surpasseth all the rest of America in that one and famous and most populous town of Chiapa of the Indians."

While the situation is more beautiful than that of any other town I know of in Mexico, Chiapa has suffered from the economic and political disasters that have ruined so much of the country's civic beauty. But it still has great charm, and if there had been as much color and interest in the Indian life as there was in the architecture and the landscape I might well have ended my quest there.

The two most striking features of the plaza are the circular market building which we at first took for a bull ring, and the covered brick fountain built in the sixteenth century by Fray Rodrigo de Leon, which would be far handsomer if it were stuccoed over.



I suppose the designation "of the Indians" was dropped as Chiapa became more mestizo in character. But Mexicans have an annoying penchant for honoring their distinguished men by naming towns after them, and Chiapa now has the official title of Chiapa de Corzo, in recognition of the reform legislation obtained for the state by Don Angel Albino Corzo. The same title might with justice be shared equally by Professor Angel M. Corzo, author of the epic poem *Nandiumé*, which was my chief source of reference in writing the preceding chapter.

Nothing recalls the past glory of Chiapa so fully as the wonderful old cathedral, despite the fact that it has long been neglected and that the adjoining monastery has been turned into a prison. Vicho and I climbed the endless circular staircase to the top of the tower, where we found an Indian sacristan in a web of ropes ringing the old bells.

Church bells! Christianity's loveliest symbol! Spain's most beautiful gift to the Indians! Is it any wonder the natives fell to their knees when they first heard these bronze voices of a new religion ringing in the wilderness? Or that they never tired of building towers to put them in? If there is any sound nearer to that of the voice of God than the solemn intoning of a great bell I do not know it.

And these beautiful bells of Chiapa, still deep and resonant after four hundred years! The largest weighs four and a half tons—four and a half tons of metal with the temper of Venetian glass! How did the fathers cast such a bell? How did the Indians raise it to its lofty tower? How has it survived the centuries without a flaw?

Although I am six feet tall, I was dwarfed by this bell. Its very reverberations at such close range beat the breath from my lungs with rhythmic billows of sound.

And yet this colossal bell gave an impression of lightness and delicacy that came from its fineness, its pale surface texture, and the grace of its decoration. It is a work of art with a tongue to give it voice and a voice that speaks to the hearts of men. Re-

ligion cannot die so long as there are church bells. If I were Anti-Christ and wanted to abolish churches, I would begin by destroying bells.

Except for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week these bells have rung out over the tile roofs of Chiapa every day since their installation. But on those three days they are still, and the raucous *metracca*, a round cage made of laths with a wooden clapper, takes its place.

From the tower we could look out over the free open spaces and down into the patio of the old monastery, now a prison, where the convicts were spending the days of their confinement spinning henequen fiber into rope.

We crawled out on the roof around the big stuccoed domes, discovering new angles of beauty. We found ourselves in the company of four life-size statues that were seated on the square corners of the bell tower. Three were saintly figures, but the fourth was a roguish fellow with the face of a winebibber under what appeared to be a black derby hat. He was so realistic that I would not have been surprised to hear some lines of Falstaffian wit from his lips.

"Who is this figure?" we asked the sacristan.

"Cortes," said he.

Perhaps he was having his little joke, or perhaps it was the little joke of an ancient Indian sculptor. I like to think that the Indians had the spirit to make this mocking statue of their conqueror, the only one in Mexico, and put it up among the saints!

The cathedral stands on the edge of a high bluff above the Grijalva River, which we could see flowing like a stream of quicksilver in a waste of sand. Wind raised the sand in clouds, like smoke from subterranean fires. On the river floated the *pirogues* of the Indians, all headed, we noticed, for a little inlet below the bluff.

On leaving the cathedral we took a steep path down to the

beach, where we found boys flying their kites. Little long-tailed birds were being blown about like scraps of paper by the wind.

The men came in poling their *pirogues*—the same sort of dugout canoes as those which the Zapotec slaves brought the Spaniards to help them pursue the Chiapanecans across the river. Each had a little flat poop upon which the men sat or stood.

The *pirogues* all nosed into the same spot of the bank until they spread out fanwise. The men leaped from boat to boat to get ashore. Their cargoes consisted of firewood and yucca root, which they loaded upon their backs or heads and carried up the bank to the town.

We talked with some of the men, and they told us that they came from the villages up the river; this gave us the idea of going back with them.

"Do you go near Las Casas?" we asked, for that was where we wanted to go next.

"The nearest village we go to is two days on horseback from there," they told us.

"But can we be sure of getting horses?"

"Perhaps, yes."

We had learned from bitter experience the difficulty of getting horses on the most gilt-edged assurances, so we could imagine what to expect from such a doubtful affirmative. Vicho, however, was all for it, not caring whether we rode or walked, but I was still on bad terms with my feet and, as regarded this proposition, they were definitely cold.

As we left the river the sun slipped behind the mountains leaving the sky a luminous silver and blue. Hundreds of bright green parrots, all chattering like monkeys, flew across the valley to their roosting places in the opposite hills.



## XXVIII: YESTERDAY IN THE LAND OF TOMORROW

**A**LREADY there are airways in the Land of Tomorrow. I squeezed with four others into the trim little Travelair which left Tuxtla that morning for Las Casas. Besides the pilot, Vicho, and myself, there was a traveling salesman and a young woman with a nursing baby and a puppy that had hardly got its eyes open.

I had virtually given up hope of finding the pre-Cortesian pageantry which, like a will-o'-the-wisp, had beckoned me from border to border. My chief reason for wanting to go to Las Casas was to place a spiritual wreath at the feet of the greatest man produced by the Conquest and, in my humble judgment, as great a man as ever lived.

America would have been conquered, if not by Cortes, Alvarado, and Pizarro, then in time by others just as ruthless. But if it had not been for one great-souled man—Bartolomé de Las Casas—the seeds of freedom would never have been sown in the bloody wake of the conquerors.

Endowed with all the gifts essential to a great statesman or a

great prelate, Las Casas chose to renounce wealth and worldly honors in order to arouse the conscience of a world maddened with unparalleled power. Hated, mocked, and vilified by his own race, he defended the civil rights of a people who could give him nothing but their eternal gratitude. All the laws, royal decrees, and papal bulls intended to stay the destruction of the natives of America by the conquistadors and slave holders were the fruit of his efforts. Las Casas stood like a Titan between two worlds, protecting the helpless people of the one from the rapacity of those of the other. But for him there would not now be thirty million Indians inhabiting the Americas; their ancestors would have been annihilated like the Caribs.

Looking down from the plane upon the forested mountains, along whose ridges occasionally zigzagged a foot-worn Indian trail, I thought of how the courageous Las Casas, always accompanied by his giant Negro servant, whom he playfully called Little John, had walked countless leagues, even after he had passed his three score and ten, in the service of his beloved Indians.

Far below I could see the tortuous Grijalva River flowing toward the sea. Las Casas, then seventy, had come up that river in 1545 as the first bishop of Chiapas. He had accepted the see, not for glory, but for the official power to enforce the Laws of the Indies, of which he was the author. The town toward which I was flying, now named in his honor, was the scene of his last bitter conflict with the forces of greed.

If Father Las Casas had but known the magic of wings! If he could have traveled by air clipper instead of in a creaking caravel the dozen times he crossed the Atlantic to plead his cause before the Crown and the Council of the Indies—how different the history of America might have been!

Now we were flying over inhabited country. In little clearings were clusters of round thatched huts. Tiny people, like animated dolls, went about tending the livestock, fetching water, scratch-

ing the soil with toy hoes. This scattered community, the pilot said, was Zinacantán.

A few minutes later we sighted the old tile roofs of Las Casas, paving the floor of a mountain-ringed valley. Swooping down upon the flying field, we landed as daintily as a sparrow.

There was a chill tang to the air, for Las Casas, while deep in the tropics, is seven thousand feet above the torrid jungle. We found, to our surprise, a larger city than Tuxtla. Las Casas, founded in 1538 by Don Diego de Mazariegos and a few years later given a royal charter as Ciudad Real (Royal City) by Charles V of Spain, was the capital of Chiapas until 1890 when, for convenience' sake, the government removed to Tuxtla. In 1921 it had eighteen thousand inhabitants.

As we passed through crooked streets paved with small stones and lined with houses painted in gay tints, we caught flashes of color in flowery patios, of pretty faces behind wooden grilles protecting paneless windows, and of children playing and laughing. We heard the musical tattoo of a marimba playing *Ramona*, which is a natural for this instrument. Now and then we saw a dashing *charro* in big sombrero and skin-tight pants riding a prancing horse with a bridle and saddle richly decorated with silver.

Las Casas is famous for its wooden saddles. They are works of art that require the co-operation of several craftsmen—saddlemaker, stirrupmaker, and silversmith.

The saddlemaker employs different woods, all well seasoned, and builds up the saddle from a score of separate parts. Especial care is taken with the pommel, which is in the form of a large flat-topped knob and is the distinctive feature of the Mexican saddle. While white pine will serve for other parts, the wood for the pommel must not only be harder, but selected from the toughest section of the tree—the fork. The finest pommels are made of black walnut and *jícara*—the wood of the tree that produces the gourds used for domestic purposes. When the saddle is ready, it goes to the silversmith, who ornaments it with florid

designs in hammered silver, and then turns it over to the stirrup-maker. Usually the leather seat and stirrups are elaborately chased and further encrusted with silver. Such a saddle costs one hundred and eighty pesos, or about thirty-six dollars—three or four times as much as an ordinary horse.

As soon as we had taken a room at the hotel, we went to see the life in the plaza. What was my astonishment to find it peopled with Indians who seemed to have come across the border from Guatemala, or rather, so strange were their costumes, to have walked right out of a remote past! At last I had found a corner of Mexico where even the sombrero, serape, and *reboso* were unknown to the Indians!

I was struck by the physical beauty of the men from Zinacantán, over which we had just flown. They are a rosy-cheeked, full-blooded people, strongly built and energetic, as mountain folk generally are. These bronzed Adonises not only have proud and handsome features, but uniformly beautiful legs, which are displayed to advantage by the brief white pants they wear. Unusually tall for Indians, they are, as a race, the most perfectly formed men I have ever seen.

They wear a stiff palm-leaf hat which has a wide brim and low crown and ribbons dangling in back, the colors of which indicate whether the wearer is married or single. Their natural wool *chamarra*, or sleeveless tunic, comes only to the hips and is fringed along the bottom. They wear a gray kerchief with purple tassels tied around their heads and covering the lower half of the face against the chill of the morning, but thrown across the shoulders during the heat of the day. Their sandals have high leather backs, like those seen in Mayan bas reliefs—the higher the back the higher the caste of the wearer. They are story-book people, like drawings for Robin Hood come to life.

The *presidente* of Zinacantán wears a long black wool tunic, the fringes of which come to the top of his sandals or *caites*, as they are called here as in Guatemala. But his chief insignia of

office is a long black staff with ribbons tied through a hole near the top and a silver head upon which his title is engraved.

While somewhat less picturesque than the men, the women of Zinacantán, in their snowy white *huipiles*, blue skirts pleated in front and back and bound about their trim hips with a bright red *faja*, seem scrupulously clean and very intelligent.

There is nothing downtrodden about these Zinacantecos. Jaunty and vital, cleanly and self-respecting, they excite not pity, but the greatest admiration. Their striking superiority is perhaps due to the fact that they are mostly merchants who buy salt in the lowlands for sale in Las Casas and the surrounding villages—a good deal freer life than that of the farmer or craftsman.

In contrast to the Zinacantecos were the poorer Indians from Huistán, Cancuc, and Chamula.

The Huistecos go barefoot and wear only a breech clout tied with a red sash, and a short tunic of black wool with a white pin stripe. Their little flat-crowned hat, worn on the back of the head, is said to have been copied from a halo. They are called Coyotes, perhaps because they may have a strain of negro blood.

The men of Cancuc look like knights' pages out of *Ivanhoe* in their simple knee-length tunic tied with a red sash and their shoulder-cut hair. They have a reputation for fierceness, and always go armed with a stout staff and a machete carried in a shoulder scabbard. In 1935 they massacred all the mestizos in their territory in reprisal for the oppression to which the whites had subjected them. They still use names like Juan Eagle or José Flower, combining Christian saint's names with the day names of the ancient Mayan calendar. They are so poor that they eat field mice, cooked without removing the skin or the guts.

When a Cancuc youth wants to marry he goes to the girl's home, gets drunk with the family, and then grabs the girl and carries her off. The girl resists, screams, and scratches, but the more fight she shows the better he likes it. It is a proverb in Cancuc that she who goes easily seldom makes a good wife.



While the raggedest and dirtiest Indians were the Chamulas, we were assured that they are the most industrious tribe in Chiapas. Their deplorable condition has been brought about by their inability to get a fair price for their products and by the cruel way in which they have been exploited by the German coffee planters, who prefer Chamula laborers for their docility and diligence.

We saw these poor Indians enticed into the offices of the labor agents by offers of cash advances which they would squander in the first cantina for *comiteco*, the powerful *aguardiente* of Chiapas.

"Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish," say the Proverbs, "and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts."

"Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

But when the Indians recover from their spree, they find that they have been shanghaied to a coffee plantation. They are made to go through the travesty of signing contracts, but most of their wages are withheld on the ground that they owe the planter the money spent on *comiteco*.

The Chamulas come to Las Casas with their lean turkeys, chickens, fruits, vegetables, and doll-like Indian furniture and congregate on the steps of the cathedral. It was receiving a fresh coat of paint in anticipation of the forthcoming visit of the president of Mexico. The Indians wanted to show the man who had tried to kill the church that reports of her death were greatly exaggerated.

The cathedral existed as a parochial church several years before the actual founding of the city. In the year 1538, when Mazariegos laid out the streets of the new town, Pope Paul III issued a bull elevating the church to the status of cathedral and Chiapas into a bishopric. The first bishop to be appointed having died on his way to Chiapas, the see was not occupied until Father Las Casas arrived in 1545.

I went inside to gaze reverently at the pulpit from which the

fiery and uncompromising Protector of the Indians set his congregation by the ears by threatening them all with ex-communication if they did not at once free their Indian slaves and restore to them their lands and wealth. I could imagine the consternation and wrath of the slave holders who had attempted to buy off the incorruptible bishop as had been done with so many ease-seeking prelates in other parts of New Spain. So great was the storm aroused by the demand of Father Las Casas that some cried "Shoot him!" and one man went so far as to fire a blank cartridge outside the window. But the good bishop had been facing the violent opposition of his countrymen for forty years and could not be intimidated.

When I went out, I found Vicho standing raptly on the cathedral steps.

"I've just been listening to the most interesting conversation I've ever heard," he said. "And I couldn't understand a word."

I was about to make a wise crack, but he stopped me.

"Listen," he said, pointing to a group of Chamula women.

He was right. They were speaking Tzotzil, of which we did not understand a word, but their conversation was as delightful as the cooing of doves.

We wandered about, sampling the delicious fruits and enjoying the brilliant colors. Piled in pyramids, like symbols, were golden oranges, *chayotes*, *pabuas* (a sort of avocado), black *jocotes*, potatoes, chili (a variety called *siete caldos*, literally seven hots), *pepinos* (sweet baby melons), and *granaditas* (fruit of the passion flower).

When I bought a couple of oranges, the vendor said the price was a "*quartillo*." As the Indians trade in such small quantities, they have a monetary system all their own and deal in coins that are no longer legal tender. A *quartillo* is three centavos (three-fifths of a cent); a *quinto*, five centavos (one cent); a *medio*, six centavos (one and a fifth cents); a *real*, twelve centavos (two and two-fifths cents); two *reals*, twenty-five centavos (five cents); a *tostón*, fifty centavos (ten cents); and a *pata-*

*cón*, one peso (twenty cents). When an Indian sells anything for one *real* (actually twelve and a half centavos) he deducts, instead of adds a half cent, thus cheating himself instead of the customer.

Leaving the plaza we walked up the main street, a long narrow street of little shops no bigger than money changers' booths. The sun was so hot and the air so cold that in the open we were scorched and in the shade, chilled. Las Casas is the only place I know of where you can get a sunburn and chilblains at the same time.

As the street runs east and west, the shops facing the sun have hooded doorways, while those on the opposite side are protected merely by the deep eaves which are a characteristic of the houses. These shops exist mainly on the trade with the Indians, and we found them full of earthenware cooking utensils, candles, *sayucales* (palm-leaf rain capes), tasseled kerchiefs, embroidered shirts, woolen and cotton cloth, woven headribbons and belts, sandals, monkey hides, and guitars. Every shop displayed at least a dozen guitars, for the Indians of Chiapas are very musical and carry their guitars wherever they go. Most of the instruments have fourteen strings, a type of guitar called a *bajo*. They are made of white pine with cedar sounding boards and are the work of local carpenters. Each instrument bears a sentimental inscription, such as "Precious Princess," "You are my heart," and "I live in the passion of your love." The top price was five pesos, or one dollar.

I noted the costumes of fifteen different villages in the Las Casas market. The most colorful was that of Larrainzar. I saw a woman carrying an extra *huipil* and tried to buy it from her, but she and her companions flew from me like frightened city pigeons. I will tell more about these people in the next chapter, as we were lured to Larrainzar by the beauty of the costume and went there to see the market.



## XXIX: THE CHAMULAS

WE rode for two and a half hours through the township of Chamula, which covers six hundred and fifty square miles.

When we came to the village center, we saw only a church, a town hall, and a few scattered huts. The twenty thousand Chamula Indians still live just as their pre-colonial ancestors did, in isolated *parajes*, or parishes, of a dozen or so families in each. As this is the state of the primitive tribes all over Mexico, it can be seen how great is the task of the government in trying to bring them within the sphere of national culture and economy.

The town center, as may be imagined, is not greatly frequented, except when there is a market or fiesta. The Chamulas are not particular about having their children educated nor their marriages solemnized by civil or religious services. They are extremely practical; they live too close to starvation not to be.

The women are shepherdesses and the men farmers, craftsmen, weavers and dyers. They cultivate the soil with sticks and without the help of domestic animals, their only modern tool being the machete. They weave woolen cloth as fine as English tweeds,

and possess a secret black dye that will keep its depth of color so long as the material lasts. The terrible irony of their life is that while they raise the finest wheat and potatoes in the world, their extreme poverty obliges them to subsist solely on corn. They specialize in making furniture, but sit and sleep on the bare earth. Once they put on a garment they do not remove it under any circumstances until it falls off in rags. Such is their abysmal degradation that when a member of the family dies the survivors merely inter the body in a shallow grave by the side of the hut.

The Chamulas look upon their children as an economic asset, and rather than lose their services in the home and field, they often bribe the teacher to let them stay away from school. Teachers who are stubborn about the matter of attendance are sometimes mutilated or murdered.

The Chamulas believe in trial marriage. A boy who wants to marry a girl has to live in her home for six months before marriage. While they do not sleep together during this probationary period, the girl cooks the boy's meals, mends his clothes, and washes his hands and his laundry just as if she were already his wife. He, in turn, must prove his fitness to support her by working. If both are satisfied at the end of this trial relationship, the parents give a fiesta and the marriage is consummated.

The young couple live with the bride's parents until the boy has earned enough by his labor to pay the girl's father whatever he thinks it has cost him to raise her. Then they are free to build their own house of wattled branches and *guano*-palm thatch. All the neighbors pitch in and help the young husband, and when the place is finished there is an alcoholic house warming.

If a married couple does not get along well together, the woman finds another man or goes back to her parents. There is never any fuss about her keeping the children. Before long, a man generally enlarges his menage to include another wife; if it comes to a choice, he usually leaves the one with the most children. A woman, however, is expected to be true to one man at a time. If a husband learns of a wife being unfaithful to him, he

will either kill her lover or else go to a sorcerer and have him bewitched. A woman who dares to live openly with two men at the same time is publicly stripped and tortured to death.

The Chamulas are able to bear their dire poverty because of their intense religious faith. Religion, for them, is the invariable force that molds and governs humanity, the only source of spiritual tranquillity, and the justification of every sacrifice. They are nature worshipers who seek in every meteorological and physical phenomenon a manifestation of divine will. Thus they consider an epidemic of disease as a scourge resulting from the displeasure of their gods. No human remedies can avail, unless the cause can be traced to the evil will of a sorcerer. Once during an epidemic of measles a woman who was accused of being a witch was publicly sacrificed, while for a similar reason the entire family of a supposed witch doctor was murdered. Not even the dogs were spared.

The Chamulas have a legend of the earth's being covered by a flood which destroyed humanity save for a few men and women, who were turned into tigers (jaguars) and monkeys, and became, somewhat on the Darwinian theory, the ancestors of the race. In their ritual dances they don headdresses of monkey skins. On the Day of the Dead they mark the cardinal points on every grave with four sticks and put food by each for the gods of the Harvest, Rain, Fire, and Wind.

On every wind-swept hill in this strange mountainous land of Father Las Casas we saw crooked crosses with offerings of pine branches and flowers.

But as primitive as are the Chamulas, they are highly civilized in comparison with another Chiapas tribe—the Lacandones. We heard a great deal about these Indians and saw the rude bows and arrows which are their only weapons. The men of this tribe let their hair grow long and dress exactly like the women in a long white gown, so that it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart from their appearance. Catarrh is fatal to them, and they dread it so greatly that if a stranger comes among them with a cough

they will immediately run him out. On the other hand should he appear to be in strong physical condition, they will put him in a corral with the women in order to improve the race. They themselves never leave the jungle and are seldom seen, even by the chicle hunters. It is said they are fast dying out.

Vicho wanted to visit the Lacandonos. But I was looking for evidences of Indian civilization and not the absence of it. Soon after our return to Mexico City, however, Professor Chávez Orozco, chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, commissioned Vicho to take medical supplies to the Lacandonos and to try and find out how many of them there are.

The country through which we were riding was quite primitive enough for me. The only modern touch was the telephone line to Larrainzar, and that was made of barbed fence wire.

It was a very broken country, forested with pine, cypress, oak, and cedar. There were large areas of sterile land, scarred with crumbling cracks, as if the earth were rotten. Perhaps the Chamulas are widely scattered because of the scarcity of arable land. Yet in some mysterious way these people who live on the verge of starvation raise enough potatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers, and wheat to supply even the most distant markets. We met Indians trotting over the trail with backs bent under one hundred-and-fifty pound loads of wheat bread, which they were taking to Tabasco on the Gulf of Campeche.

Although we saw few habitations, the country was alive with Indians. We met them going up and down the trail. Some were carrying produce, others were weaving hats and rain capes as they went, while still others had only their guitars which they strummed gaily, carefree as the troubadours of old. Women tended the roving flocks of black and white sheep, each woman being invariably followed by a graduated queue of children.

Darkness was dropping swiftly when we finally passed beyond the municipal limits of Chamula and saw on a hill before us the little white adobe town which bears the name of the Chiapan historian Larrainzar.



### XXX: TWILIGHT IN LARRAINZAR

AS we rode into the forlorn mountain village in this twilight hour, the sky seemed to lift and separate from the earth, to become a hollow void above the dark hills. Bats glided through the air in silent flight, like beasts in dreams. People moved about in the spaces of indistinctness and gloom, but in the grayness of things there were no colors that could be named. Everything seemed diaphanous, impalpable, chimerical. We heard a low mumbling almost before we saw a group of men dressed in long black official tunics and holding long staves of office, intoning a ritual prayer before a tall wooden cross. In the falling night all were ranged in a single dark silhouette.

A pale and uncertain light illuminated the interior of the church in the plaza with its savor of cavern, of old age. In the deep recess of the altar a few candles were burning, and Indians were on their knees before them, no doubt making vows. The light from the slender flames was lost in the indistinct emptiness of the vaults. There was an odor of incense in the air.

Two Indians, one with a drum and the other with a primitive flute, stationed themselves before the entrance to the church and



played the monotonous and plaintive music of their race—music that seemed to come from the deep night of time.

A feeling of religion that touched fanaticism hung over the village, and with this feeling was mingled a respect for an ancient cult, for protecting symbols, for strange gods. We had the sensation of plunging into the distant times of the past.

At the *presidencia* we were met by the secretary general, a *ladino* who wore an overcoat, riding breeches, and an air of importance. He studied us narrowly through slits of eyes set close to a long pointed nose. He had a small cruel mouth and large jowls, like a rodent. This man was a paid political appointee, who held the liquor concession and who, from his rat-trap office, ran the show.

The office of the secretary general in most of the Indian villages has three doors—one to the street, one to the cantina, and one to the jail. (In Larrainzar the jail was underneath the bandstand—a double punishment for offenders!)

With an eye to increasing his revenues, the secretary general watches the Indians come to market with their pigs and chickens. When he spots a particularly fat pig he has one of his henchmen get the owner drunk in the cantina and involve him in a fight, so as to create an excuse for throwing him into jail and confiscating the pig by way of a fine.

The secretary general asked to see our guns, and when we told him we had none, he showed us his own. He said he always carried it because "the Indians are very bad." But we could not help thinking that, if the Indians were less docile, his gun would not save him. Its more probable use was for anyone ill-advised enough to pry too closely into his affairs.

While he was fondly handling his gun, the *presidente municipal* came up. He was a small Indian with a moon face and twinkling, friendly eyes. Although mystified as to the reason for our visit, he offered to serve us and introduced us to the other town officials. There were three *alcaldes*, two *gobernadores*, three *regidores*, one *sindico*, eight *mayores*, three *capitanes*, and two

*alferes*. All were Indians, serving without pay. They had composed the group we had passed praying before the cross, as we entered Larrainzar.

At first blush this municipal council might seem rather large for a community of only twenty-six hundred souls. But Larrainzar, like Chamula, covers a vast territory and is divided up into fifty-two widely separated parishes and *colonias*. (A *colonia* is a settlement on a confiscated *hacienda* that has been divided into *ejidos*.) The town center of Larrainzar has but four hundred and forty-five inhabitants.

The *presidente* offered to let us spend the night in his office, which was bare of furniture except for a few rough tables and benches and a fragrant carpet of pine needles.

"You are probably not used to such rough accommodations," sneered the secretary general. "I will see that you have a room with two beds."

But we did not want to accept any favors from him, nor did we want to offend the *presidente*.

"We are quite used to sleeping on the floor," we said, "and will be thoroughly comfortable here."

The secretary general shrugged his beefy shoulders.

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen," he said, and left us abruptly.

When we were alone we examined our quarters with our electric torch. The walls were covered with posters intended to educate the Indians to the value of education, hygiene, and the revolution. There was one depicting the sex life of the locust. Another showed President Cárdenas as a prize fighter, with *La Patria* holding up the fist that had dealt a K.O. to the foreign oil interests—a poster which, in the light of subsequent difficulties, had lost a good deal of its punch.

The tables were strewn with a flood of letters and literature from various departments in the capital, all unread, since the only literate person in Larrainzar was the secretary general.

We had supper at a little *fonda* kept by a woman named Doña

America. The room opened off the tiny shop where she sold candles, cheap cigarettes, soda water, and a few fruits and vegetables. In a curtained-off alcove was an image of the Virgin in a bower of flowers. The kitchen was across a back *patio* filled with chickens, pigs and dogs. It did not seem promising, but we fared very well.

Out in the plaza the Indians were squatting around their supper fires in small family groups, eating their *posole* and *tortillas* and laughing and talking softly, filled with the excitement of the morrow. The whole scene was rendered Rembrandtesque by the firelight and fantastic shadows. The beat of drums—*dum, dum, dum-dum-dum*—came from near and far, in pulsing waves that bore pleas to the gods for good prices in the market. Occasionally the shrill piping of the native flutes rose above the drumbeat like the amplified chirping of a cricket, or a rocket blazed skyward and burst with a loud report.

A family of Indians was camped in the corridor outside our door at the *presidencia* when we turned in. We rolled up in our blankets on the soft pine needles and pillowed our heads on our saddles. The night was so bitterly cold that not even Abishag, the fair damsel chosen to warm King David in his old age, could have comforted us. We slept fitfully, and through the night we heard the barking of dogs, the wheezing of mules, the burst of rockets, and the disturbing pounding of Indian drums. It was not a little frightening to be alone and unprotected among a people who have every reason to hate the white man. We had faith that the Indians, whom we wished well, would be friendly. But faith, after all, is merely a belief in the improbable.

■



## XXXI: THE RAINBOW

WITH the first light we heard the whimpering of babies, the low, soft voices of men and women, and the braying of burros; and knew that the town would soon be astir. When we went out we saw the Indians huddled close to their fires, warming themselves with hot black coffee, mothers warming their babies with their milk.

We walked down to the river to wash up. The misty whitish half light of a cold dawn bathed the hills. Houses of cane, like enormous bird cages, dotted the slopes. The eaves of the thatch roofs were like trimmed beards. Flocks of sheep and goats moved slowly across the meadows. The air of the mountains was as pure as in the first days of the world. We could feel our lungs dilate, our cheeks glow.

While waiting for breakfast at Doña America's, we watched the pigs and chickens, which wandered in and out from the *patio*. A rooster was paying court to a fat hen when a bigger rooster chased him away. He at once transferred his affections to another hen, thus setting a pattern for primitive life.

Indians passed in the street in ever increasing numbers, all

bound for the plaza. When we made our own way there I saw to my joy that my cross-country quest for color—color in life—was ended. Here at last were the rainbow hues that have faded from Mexican life before the rising sun of civilization.

Yes, even the ruddy hues of Guatemala were surpassed, for Chiapas is still further removed from modern influences. There was color, color everywhere. Strong primary reds, blues, and yellows in the costumes of the Indians—colors echoed endlessly, in varying hues and shades, in accessories, in pyramided piles of tropical fruits, in long lines of brilliant yarns, like vivid reflections of the aurora borealis. The Indians clustered thickly in the plaza, like bees, their low voices making a confused bumbling like that heard in flower gardens on a summer's day. The blaze of color created by this human swarming, accentuated by the white walls of the buildings and the searchlight glare of the tropical sun, whose heat persisted uncannily in spite of the approach of winter, gave an impression of extreme foreignness.

This impression was increased by the Oriental aspect of the men, whose faces had wispy hair on lip and chin and whose mandarinlike appearance—wide-brimmed hats with peaked crowns and dangling colored ribbons, striped wool sleeveless tunics, red embroidered sashes, tasseled kerchiefs, and stanch bare legs—gave a strong savor of the Far East. The dress of the women, especially that of the women of Larrainzar, if somewhat less bizarre, was even gayer in pattern and color. Their long, raven-black hair was wound with scarlet ribbons and coiled around their heads like a turban. Their *huipiles*, or tunic blouses, were woven by themselves on their crude two-stick looms, in the most sophisticated designs, embodying symbols—little geometric figures of men and women, birds and animals in bright colors—which have been taught without patterns by mother to daughter from generation to generation back to the dim centuries before there were white men in America. The yarn used was native wool, hand-carded and vat-dyed with animal and vegetable colors, fast against sun and rain. Necklaces of ancient silver coins and

crucifixes interspersed with bright beads were coiled about the neck of nearly every woman, indicating by the number of strands her wealth and social status. All the skirts were ankle length and made of hand-loomed cloth, dyed a fadeless dark blue, plain or with a white pin stripe, which was wrapped around the waist with pleats in front and back and held up by a parti-colored belt wound round and round until it made a stiff stomacher twelve inches and more in width.

In spite of the summerlike fierceness of the sun, there was a freshness in the air, virginal and vivifying, that made the lungs expand to receive it at the source of all vigor and all existence. The cheeks of the Indians were ruddy from the crispness of this mountain air; they had a fresh bloom like that of fruits which no one has touched.

All morning these primeval figures of another day came in to the market, filling the teeming plaza until there was hardly space to move about. They came down from their windy solitudes, following each other single file, dressed in their Tibetan hats and tunics like so many dalai lamas, their black mops of hair roughly fringed across their low full foreheads. Every woman had a baby jouncing in a sling on her back, for the Indians, like the Orientals, abhor virginity.

Always on entering or leaving the plaza, the Indians stationed themselves for a moment before the church, first facing the church itself and then turning toward the big wooden cross in front of it, while praying and crossing themselves in an elaborate mosaic, touching the eyes, nose, mouth, and chin. What was in those secret minds, which only the priests have ever plumbed?

The low-pitched murmur of voices bargaining, gossiping, and praying in the native tongue was like a chant, beneath which could be heard a tingling accompaniment of stringed music, as many Indians wandered about idly fingering their fourteen-string guitars. Music and color are as necessary to these Indians of the Chiapas highlands as the air they breathe.

As we went about looking at the beautiful designs of the

women's *huipiles* and their wonderful old necklaces, our strange presence caused a good deal of excitement. What had we come for? What did we want? Probably no other white man had ever come just to look on, and the thought of being admired by members of the dominant race would doubtless be the last idea that would occur to these much-imposed-upon people. While they waited to discover our purpose, they gazed at us with the baffling look the Indians must have put on when the first Spaniards came among them and they realized that their bows and arrows were useless for defense. By it they pass through life as relatively untouched as it is possible for men to do. Even death loses its sting against the armor of their indifference.

An Indian asked us if we were Germans, for the German coffee planters were the only blond whites these peoples had ever seen.

"No," we said, "we are from the United States."

"Ah," he said, "then you are Poles."

This unexpected conclusion surprised and puzzled us. How had this Indian who was ignorant of the United States heard of the Poles, of all people? I recalled that the games of chance at Mexican fiestas are called *polacas* and drew the inference that Poles may have introduced them.

I told the Indian that the *huipiles* of the Larrainzar women were very similar to those worn by the Maya-Quiché women of Chichicastenango in Guatemala. But he had never heard of Chichicastenango; and even though he himself was of Mayan stock, he seemed unaware of his racial cousinship to the Indians across the border. Chiapas belongs to Mexico purely in the political sense. Historically, geographically, and ethnologically it is a part of Guatemala, to which it anciently belonged.

The two musicians with flute and drum who had played in front of the church the night before appeared again, somewhat the worse for copious libations of *comiteco*, which caused their monotonous weird music to take on an even weirder note.

Suddenly there was a clamor of church bells, rockets bursting,

firecrackers exploding. From the church debouched a procession of Indians. At their head came two standard bearers, one carrying a large red banner with a gold X, and the other a white one with a red X. They were followed by a sort of high priest with a swinging censer. Then came four men shouldering a litter with a statue of San Andrés, the patron saint, under a crimson-and-gold scalloped canopy. A group of women with censers came next and then a great body of marchers.

This painted stream flowed through Larrainzar and encircled the brilliant market with a ribbon of glowing color. While Vicho went about using up film after film, I sketched furiously, delighting in colors that needed no mixing to match. This was what I had come to Mexico to seek; this was the sort of pageantry that makes the spectacle of unspoiled Indian life a perpetual enchantment of the senses; this was the beauty that Father Las Casas saved from destruction by his efforts in behalf of the Indians four hundred years ago.

The discovery of America metamorphosed Spain from a cluster of small states struggling for existence against a powerful enemy on their own soil into the greatest empire on earth. In the first few years of the conquest, every Spaniard considered himself not only a conqueror, but a missionary. He had no doubt about bringing the Indian the true faith. That belief atoned, in his sight, for the slaying of twelve million Indians for not having been baptized.

Spain brought America, not peace, but the sword. Father Las Casas, on the other hand, brought not the sword, but peace. It is easy to understand that the Spanish colonists, who looked on the Indians as slaves, were furious with Father Las Casas, who treated them as men.

The religious ritual of the Indians today bears the imprint of Catholicism in its outward manifestations. The image of the saint has supplanted the stone image, but the saint is an idol to the Indian, who expects the same practical results from the worship of one or the other.



The object of the procession was to raise money for the saint's day fiesta, soon to be celebrated. Every congregation of Tzotzil Indians has its patron saint (that of Larrainzar being San Andrés) in honor of whom an annual pagan celebration is held, which lasts for eight or ten days. Those named to organize the fiesta are called *alferes*, and it is their duty to raise the necessary funds for an abundant supply of fireworks and firewater. At frequent intervals the procession halted, and the Indians pressed around the litter of the saint, praying and crossing themselves, making their donations and kissing the hands of the *alferes*, who blessed them.

In the forthcoming fiesta the chief attraction would be horse races through the streets of the village, the goal being the house of one of the *alferes*, and the prize a long drink of *comiteco*.

After the races, all the people would crowd into the church where the governor of the parish would pray and the *alferes* would answer him in a chant in the native tongue, accompanied by the monotonous music of the guitars, while all the members of the congregation, men and women and children, danced without order or unison. This dance consists of a sort of march whose movements are very slow and characterized by raising the feet a few inches from the ground. The dance ended, the governor and the *alferes* would lead the people out of the church and through the streets of the village, accompanied by a band composed of a man who sounds a sort of cornet in the form of a bull's horn and a drummer and flutist.

Before leaving Larrainzar I wanted to acquire a woman's *huipil*, some of which were exquisite in design. The women could not be approached directly, because they did not understand Spanish, so we talked to their husbands; but they merely smiled and shook their heads. Finally Vicho, who had become great friends with the *presidente municipal*, enlisted his aid, and after much argument, we reached an agreement with an Indian to buy his wife's *huipil*. Although she herself did not seem very happy about parting with it, she dutifully slipped it off over her head.

(She had another on underneath.) When I took it and examined it more closely I found a flea and picked it off. The Indians laughed, and the poor woman turned a shade darker under her bronzed skin.

Vicho took a snapshot of the *presidente* with his council and promised to send him a print.

"If you are going to send me only one photograph," said the *presidente*, "I would rather have the one you just took of those three pretty girls."

We left Larrainzar with a regret deepened by the fact that now, for the first time, we were turning our faces toward home. But we were returning with the satisfaction of having found, in the last despairing moment like an answer to a prayer, that which we had journeyed so far to seek. In this remote world of the past with its bird-cage houses, guitar music, and colorful costumes and customs we had experienced for a moment a way of life which we have hopelessly lost but can never quite forget.



## XXXII: THE FIRST GREAT AMERICAN

THE Indians of Guatemala and Chiapas, in particular, owe their almost unmolested survival to Bartolomé de Las Casas, who saved the native American race from extinction during the Conquest. But in striking a blow for Indian rights, Las Casas also became the champion of human liberty. All Americans should know that the principles upon which our government, and every true democracy, is founded, were proclaimed by the first great American at the very time white men first set foot on our continent. These principles—the original equality of all men, the right to private property, and the obligation of government to obtain the consent of the governed—need to be fully grasped, reaffirmed, and battled for by every generation of men who wish to be free. Our fabled isolation gone, we shall be obliged to defend our future liberties as Americans did in the times of Lincoln, Washington, and Las Casas.

Born in Seville in 1474, Bartolomé was an eighteen-year-old law student in the famous University of Salamanca, when Columbus returned from his second voyage with seven Indian slaves. One of these slaves, which had been given to the boy's

father, a gentleman of French descent who had accompanied the admiral, became the page for a few days of the future Protector of the Indians. But Queen Isabella, shocked and angry, demanded, "Who gave Columbus permission to parcel out my vassals to anybody?" and ordered the Indians returned to America as free subjects.

After receiving his degree as a bachelor of law, Las Casas sailed for America, where, as a reward for his services in colonizing Cuba, Governor Diego Velasquez gave him a plantation worth one hundred thousand dollars and many Indian slaves.

Columbus, with the idea of filling his own and his royal master's coffers, had conceived the *repartimiento*—a scheme for parceling out Indians to the colonists to supply labor for the plantations and mines. This first step toward the total enslavement of the natives was cloaked by an appearance of paternalism. In theory, the Indians were given to the colonists only for the period necessary to convert them to Christianity and induct them into the white man's civilization.

But since the first colonists were mostly criminals and exiles, it is hardly necessary to say that the paternal part of their contract was treated by them as a joke. In the absence of white women, the colonists lived in open concubinage with the Indian women. They recognized no right of the helpless natives. When the Indians retaliated, Columbus ordered a cruel war of extermination, and a general hecatomb took place. Indians who tried to run away were pursued by bloodhounds. Resistance being futile and flight impossible, the Indians fell a prey to a sullen despair and to a mania for suicide. Whole families would hang themselves. The villagers of one pueblo would invite those of another to hang themselves together.

Then the discovery of the pearl fisheries of Cubagua began slave raids upon the islands of the Bahamas, whose natives were fine swimmers, so that the Indians who did not die in the mines found watery graves. In 1518 smallpox was imported from Spain and took a frightful toll of lives. In less than half a century

after the advent of the white man, the native population of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola (Haiti), Jamaica, and the Bahamas had vanished.

Bartolomé de Las Casas, himself a kindly master, was horrified by the cruel traffic in the natives by branded criminals from Spain who had become, as he says, "masters of the lords and kings of the land." He decided to take action. Not a man to compromise, he gave up his plantation and *repartimiento*, although it meant peril for his Indians and poverty for himself, and rode seventy miles on his only mare to Concepción de la Vega, where, in November, 1510, he took priest's orders and held the first mass in the New World.

Lashing out at the slaveholders, he declared that the will of the adventurer, exile, and criminal was the only law in the Indies. These cruel masters looked upon the Indians, he said, as "little more than beasts of burden," whose pay was "the lash and the stick." They called the Indians "dogs but did not treat them as well as dogs." They would shoot an Indian messenger just because he had been slow in delivering a letter.

Las Casas' scathing denunciation of their treatment of the Indians surprised the slaveholders, but they merely put him down as a harmless fanatic. The first voice to be raised against slavery in America went unheeded.

But for two years Las Casas went about as the self-appointed protector of the Indians, who learned to love him as their only friend. They called him Behique—Man of God—and he never disappointed their faith in him.

Realizing, however, that he could do little by his personal efforts to stem the torrent of bloodshed and murder that was fast depopulating the islands, he returned to Spain to inform King Ferdinand of the deplorable conditions in his overseas domains. He found that the gold of the New World had already corrupted many powerful courtiers and prelates in the Old World. The Bishop of Burgos, who headed the Council of the Indies, and was enjoying the revenues of a *repartimiento*, became

his implacable enemy. But Las Casas was a man of indomitable will, energy, and persistence, and when he finally got the ear of King Ferdinand he succeeded, by his eloquent exposition of conditions in America, in convincing the aged monarch of the horror of the slavery to which his Indian vassals were being subjected. He was asked to draft laws to correct the evil, but before these could be enacted, Ferdinand died, and Las Casas had to begin all over again. This experience became almost chronic, as he lived through three reigns.

Charles V was then a mere boy of eighteen with Flemish tutors who held the reins of government. But despite his minority he already showed the poise and intelligence that were to make him the greatest emperor of his time. He took a great liking to "Micer Bartholomew" as he called him, and remained his stanch friend throughout his long rule.

Although Las Casas failed to secure the abolition of the *repartimiento* at this time, he did win the support of the government for many reforms which are in force all over Latin America to this day. These provided for settlements of Indians (*rancherías*), land for *milpas* (system of *colonos*), and the reduction of the period of labor in the mines and on the plantations to four months of the year, with pay. It is interesting to note that, in proposing to gather the Indians into towns, he specified that "a church as good as means will allow must be built in each village with a public square in front of it, and regular streets." This sameness of arrangement seen in every old village of Latin America is thus attributable to Las Casas.

Armed with reform legislation, Las Casas, with the official title of Protector of the Indians, returned to Cuba in September, 1516. "The white man in America will hereafter know," says biographer L. A. Dutto, "that a man who can neither be intimidated or bribed keeps an eye on his conduct and is ready to denounce him to his sovereign." \*

Although Las Casas proved again and again that the Indians

\* Rev. L. A. Dutto, *Life of Bartolomé de Las Casas* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1904)

could be won by justice and an appeal to reason, his continued stand for the abolition of the *repartimiento* made him hated by the slaveholders. He saw that one man, supported by a government several thousands miles across the sea, could do little against the intrenched forces of greed and rapacity which were bent only on opening quick roads to riches at the cost of the life and liberty of the Indians. He could not save the natives of the islands, but a scheme was forming in his resourceful brain for preventing a similar fate befalling those of the mainland.

This was nothing less than the proposal that Charles V give Las Casas one hundred leagues of the coast of South America and all the land that lay back of it (as yet unexplored) for the peaceful evangelization of the Indians. The Bishop of Burgos opposed the plan with the laconic remark, "What money would there be in it for the king?"

Las Casas countered with a proposal asking for one thousand leagues (finally reduced to two hundred and sixty) of the coast of South and Central America to be colonized peaceably by a band of his followers to be known as the Knights of the Golden Epaulet, who would be pledged to explore the country and faithfully inform the king of the rivers and localities where gold might be found. No violence was to be done the Indians and nothing done without securing their good will and consent. The king would receive a royalty of one-sixth of all gold mined by the knights and one-fifth of the profit from the trade in pearls.

This amazing contract between the ruler of one half of Europe and all of known America and a simple American priest was solemnly signed by Charles V and Las Casas May 19, 1520, at Coruña. Although neither knew it at the time, it gave Las Casas jurisdiction over virtually all of Spanish America from Venezuela to Cape Horn.

In accepting this magnificent trust, Las Casas made a characteristic pledge: "That my meaning be made clear, I hereby renounce and decline any favor or temporal reward that your

majesty may hereafter offer me." Twenty years later he was to remind the emperor of this pledge.

Charles V asked Las Casas to write a body of laws for the reform of the Indies, which he did, making two recommendations that were to have far-reaching effects. One was to provide for the importation from Spain of colonists chosen from the agricultural classes to take the place of natives in the depopulated islands; and the other, to give the right to each settler to possess twelve Negro slaves, to enable them, after the deprivation of the Indian *repartimientos*, to continue their planting and mining operations.

Critics of Las Casas have seized upon this second recommendation to place upon him the blame for legalizing Negro slavery in America. But this is very unfair. Negro slavery had already been established both in Spain and in her colonies, and Las Casas, who knew that the Negroes thrived and multiplied under conditions fatal to the Indians, merely chose the lesser of two evils. His object was to save the Indians, but later in life he regretted this, as well as other compromises.

He spent five years at court obtaining these measures and decrees. He speaks of his efforts as "a terrible combat" and of his victory as having been "gained by the grace of God and the power of truth."

His great colonizing scheme ended in disaster. His knights deserted him, lured away by the quick profits of the slave trade, while those he recruited to take their place so mistreated the Indians that the natives destroyed his little settlement at Cumaná and massacred some of the inhabitants. Las Casas himself barely escaped with his life. This catastrophe stunned him and seemed to break his faith in finding other white men as disinterested as himself to carry out his great humanitarian projects.

There was huge rejoicing among the slaveholders when it was learned that the man who had sought to dispossess them of their slaves and ill-gotten gains had seemingly admitted defeat and entered a Dominican convent. But though he did not trouble



them or their consciences during the next five years, he did not lose his keen interest in current events. He spent his time writing his *Historia de Las Indias*, which entitles him to be known as the father of American history, and in studying civil and canon law, in which he proved himself profoundly versed when he returned to active ministry.

By 1530 the standard of Charles V floated from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from northern Mexico to Panama. Las Casas saw the natives of the continent threatened with extinction. When he learned that Pizarro had obtained the viceroyalty of Peru, he decided to try and prevent the poisonous tree of *repartimientos* being planted in Peruvian soil.

He had renewed his prestige as the Protector of the Indians by his successful mediation between the *audiencia*, or court of justice, of San Domingo and the much-feared *cacique* Henriquillo. He was no longer an untitled cleric, but a learned theologian backed by a great religious order. Returning to Spain, he secured in six months from Charles V the necessary legislation to prevent the Indians of Peru from sharing the fate of those of Mexico and the Caribbean islands.

At the end of 1530 he was in Mexico City, where he heard that Pizarro had already set foot on Peru. He was now sixty years old, but he set out at once on the thousand-mile journey over the mountains on horse and on foot to Realejo (now Corinto) in Nicaragua. There he took ship for Tumbes, near the present city of Guayaquil, where Pizarro was encamped. He delivered the imperial decree to Pizarro forbidding the enslavement of the Indians, but every reader of American history knows to what extent it was heeded. No written words, not even over the signature of Charles V, could have controlled the gold-maddened conquistadors, when they discovered the rich treasure of Peru, which produced such unheard-of amounts of the yellow metal that its value fell one thousand per cent.

Back in Nicaragua in 1532, he was building the Dominican convent of St. Paul in Leon, when a call came to return to

Hispaniola and persuade Henriquillo to acknowledge Spanish sovereignty by peaceful means, as Charles V could not tolerate an empire within his empire.

Las Casas again traversed the American continent, this time going over the terrible mountains and tropical jungles of Honduras to Trujillo, where a boat was waiting to take him to San Domingo. Once more he sought out Henriquillo in his hilly hideout. For two months no word came from him, and it was feared he was dead, when he appeared in San Domingo with Henriquillo himself. The same people who had hated and feared the Indian *cacique* now welcomed him warmly. A treaty was ratified—and lived up to. Henriquillo even became a supporter of Spanish rule.

His mission happily ended, Las Casas, in his zeal to save souls, decided to go back to Peru to see that the decrees against slavery were being carried out. But the little ship in which he embarked from Realejo, after being tossed about by storms for several weeks, was finally obliged to put back to its original port. Bishop Marroquin of Guatemala, hearing of Las Casas' unsuccessful attempt to reach Peru, wrote to him begging him to come to Santiago de Los Caballeros, the present Antigua, and reopen the Dominican convent there, as it had been abandoned and there was great need of evangelical workers.

While Las Casas was in Guatemala, he wrote a short treatise, *De Unico Vocationis Modo*, telling how the Indians could be converted by peaceful means. In it he declared that the only way to teach religion is through reason, convincing the intellect, and through charity and kindness, moving the will.

The slaveholders greeted this treatise with jeers and ridicule. Crying down its author as a visionary and theorist, they challenged him to convert the Indians of Tuzulutlán, if he wished to prove that holy exhortations were better than bullets. These inhabitants of the deep canyons and precipitous ravines of central Guatemala had so fiercely defended themselves against Spanish arms that their territory was called the Land of War.

In egging on Las Casas to attempt their peaceful conversion, the slaveholders hoped that he would either fail ignominiously or pay with his life. In either case, they told one another, they would be rid of a sore thorn in their flesh.

But Las Casas accepted the challenge, on the condition that if he succeeded the Indians would never be given in *repartimiento* and that no Spaniard would be permitted to enter their territory for five years. With the aid of three other friars, he taught some traveling Indian merchants Bible songs, and sent them with trinkets into the Land of War with instructions to sing the songs in the market place. The warlike *caciques*, on hearing them, sent for the friars, who themselves went to the Land of War and, converting the most powerful of all the chieftains, brought him back to Santiago de los Caballeros. He was warmly received by Alvarado, conqueror and governor of Guatemala, who not only took off his hat to the *cacique* but put it on his head.

Las Casas returned to the Land of War and soon succeeded in the difficult task of bringing the Indians into villages, so that they could be instructed in the ways of civilized life. He founded Rabinal and later Cobán, towns which still flourish, and in recognition of his achievements Charles V decreed that the Land of War should henceforth be known as the Land of Peace (*Vera Paz*), which name it bears today. Not all the statues erected to Las Casas form as great a monument to his memory as this region of *Vera Paz*, whose inhabitants, still proud and independent, he persuaded by gentle means from war to peace.

Crossing the Atlantic for the seventh time, Las Casas spent ten months inducing the Council of the Indies to enact the so-called New Laws. In putting through this legislation, which declared the Indians free vassals of Spain who could not be given in *repartimientos*, Las Casas gained the battle of his life. If he had failed, it is doubtful if there would now remain a vestige of the native race on the American continent.

Charles V wished the Protector of the Indians to take the see of Cuzco, Peru, but Las Casas reminded him that twenty

years before he had sworn never to accept any favor or temporal reward. When, however, the emperor pressed upon him that of Chiapas, in the province of Guatemala and contiguous to Vera Paz, for the good of the Indians, the argument proved too powerful to be refused. Consecrated at Seville March 31, 1544, he arrived, after surviving a storm off the coast of Campeche in which nine of his followers were drowned, at Ciudad Real as the first bishop of Chiapas. As the author of the New Laws prohibiting the enslavement of the Indians, he was received by the slaveholders with an outward show of polite consideration but an undercurrent of opposition that soon flared into open rebellion when it was seen that no bait they could offer him was tempting enough to make him consent to leave matters as they were.

Las Casas made it plain in his first sermon that he left the slaveholders but one choice—expropriation or excommunication. Convinced like the slave owners of the South before the Civil War, that their plantations would become worthless without the use of enforced labor, the conquistadors left no stone unturned to avoid either eventuality.

Popular clamor grew to such a pitch that the governor of Chiapas wrote to Charles V complaining of Las Casas. There were riots, and the life of the new bishop was threatened more than once. The Dominicans begged him to leave the city until the fury of the mob blew over, but he said to them:

"Where shall my life be out of danger as long as I continue to advocate the liberty of these helpless ones? The riotous conduct of the conquistadors and the venomous hatred they bear me are of long standing. Their insults wound me no longer, neither do I fear their threats."

He had hardly uttered these words when a friar rushed into the room and said that a man who had threatened Las Casas had been stabbed. The bishop immediately went to the man, bandaged his wounds with his own hands, and stayed with him for four hours. The man asked his forgiveness and became his life-long friend.

Las Casas now decided to go on a long journey to Gracias a Dios, on the Atlantic coast of Honduras, where, largely through his own instrumentality, an *audiencia* had been established. He chose to go the long way through Vera Paz in order to visit the scene of his former labors, and in every village the Indians went forth to welcome him. He gave each *cacique* an authentic copy of the decree of Charles V insuring him forever of his freedom, lands, and non-interference by the whites in his home affairs.

Bishop Marroquin came to meet Las Casas in an effort to persuade him from taking so uncompromising a stand on the slavery issue (he himself had accepted the bribe of a *repartimiento*). Las Casas refused, and it was the end of their friendship. Marroquin returned to Santiago do los Caballeros and wrote a letter to Charles V abusing Las Casas and calling him "a hypocrite whose vanity had been propped up by the mitre."

Although most of the members of the *audiencia*, including the chief justice, his old friend Alonso Maldonado, had been personally selected by Las Casas, the court adopted a plan of procrastination in considering his demands for the enforcement of the New Laws. The bishop of Chiapas persisted, however, to the point of making himself hateful to the court. One day on entering court he heard an officer say, "Put that fool out." The next day the chief justice himself lost his temper and said: "You are an unblushing coward, a bad man, a bad friar, and a bad bishop." Las Casas replied ironically, "I fully deserve all that your lordship has said of me, Señor Licenciado Alonso Maldonado." Fearing excommunication and loss of office, Maldonado swallowed his anger and apologized. But Maldonado and his family possessed sixty thousand Indian slaves. The *audiencia* did nothing.

During the absence of Las Casas, the slaveholders of Ciudad Real considered how they could prevent their bishop from returning to his see. When they heard that he was on his way home, they called a mass meeting and passed a declaration to the effect that the bishop had occupied the see illegally and was there-

fore powerless to act until the matter had been placed before the emperor.

The Dominicans of Zinacantán sent Las Casas a letter telling him of the wrath of the townspeople and urging him not to incur the risk of re-entering Ciudad Real. Indian sentinels, they said, had been placed along the road to give the alarm as soon as he should appear. But the fearless prelate decided to go on in spite of this warning.

He set out at sunset and late at night surprised the sentinels, who had fallen asleep.

"Are you ready," he said to them in their native tongue, "to betray your father?"

The Indians fell on their knees and begged his pardon.

Fearing to compromise these innocent tools of the conquistadors, who would punish them for allowing him to enter the city unheralded, Las Casas had Little John, his Negro servant, hold them while he himself tied their hands behind their backs. With his willing prisoners walking before him, Las Casas made straight for the cathedral, notified the city council of his presence, and asked them to come to the church. The councilmen entered the church without any show of respect, and while Las Casas was speaking, one man shouted "Why did you not call on us, if you had business with us?" The bishop answered calmly, "Sir, if I have to transact temporal affairs I will call on you, but if I have to speak of matters concerning the service of God or your souls I will send for you and you shall have to come, if you are Christians."

Las Casas, who was seventy-one years of age, had walked twenty miles during the night and, upon leaving the church he went to the convent to rest. But he had no sooner arrived there than a dreadful noise was heard in the yard and a band of ruffians armed with swords, stiletos, and daggers broke in.

"So goes the world," cried one of them. "The savior of the Indians ties up the Indians, but he writes memorials to Spain against us if *we* ill-treat them."

"Gentlemen," said Las Casas, "I tied them with my own hands because otherwise they would be punished for not giving warning of my coming, on account of the love they bear me."

The ruffians threatened and insulted the bishop in spite of his explanation, and one man felled little John with a cowardly blow with a cudgel. The young friars rushed to his assistance and cleared the convent of the armed men.

Realizing that they had gone too far and fearing excommunication, the conquistadors came to beg forgiveness. From now on they accorded Las Casas all the outward signs of respect. But they had not surrendered, merely changed their tactics. Instead of openly opposing the bishop, they refused all alms in an effort to nullify his work through lack of support.

Despite his advanced age, Las Casas now made the long journey to Mexico City to attend a convention of all the bishops and most prominent ecclesiastics in New Spain, called to discuss the relations existing, or that should exist, between the Spaniards and the Indians. News of his impending entry into Mexico City affected the citizens as if an army threatened their gates. In fear of an uprising, the royal commissioner begged Las Casas to stay outside the city until he could calm the populace. When Las Casas arrived the next morning, however, the crowds who gathered to see the famous Protector of the Indians did not utter a disrespectful word. In their hearts, most of the people must have admired and applauded the friend of the friendless.

Dutto declares that "no other convention of men (that which declared the independence of these United States not excepted) assembled in this western continent in the interests of liberty ever had as weighty problems to solve." Las Casas became its leading spirit, and his proposal that certain indisputable principles should be agreed upon as a basis of all discussions, was carried. Among these principles were (1) the right of everyone, regardless of race or creed, to possess that which he had acquired without prejudice to others; (2) the teaching of religion to the Indians should be on a basis only of an appeal to reason, and

(3) the Holy See had not intended that the native rulers should be deprived of their estates, jurisdictions, and dignities.

But when Las Casas pressed for an explicit declaration that the enslavement of the Indians was unjust, the convention hemmed and hawed. Finally he was told privately that the viceroy himself had requested the body not to touch on the subject *for reasons of state*. Las Casas made no answer, but the following Sunday he mounted the pulpit and took as his text a verse of Isaiah: "Who say to the Seers: See not; and to them that behold: Behold not those things that are right; speak to us pleasant things." The viceroy accepted the rebuke and the suggestion of Las Casas that the matter be taken up at an unofficial *junta*.

The *junta* decided that Indian slavery was unjust, and a memorial of the conclusions agreed upon was sent to the emperor informing him that the bishops, theologians, and jurists of America were agreed on the principle that the Indians should be free. Thus was Las Casas vindicated and the conquistadors rebuked.

But unknown to Las Casas and the convention, Charles V had, on November 20, 1545, partially revoked the New Laws. This news reached the venerable Protector of the Indians in Mexico City and was a blow such as he had not received since the catastrophe of Cumaná. He decided to go to Spain where he could be near the seat of government and watch over all the Indians, instead of the turbulent little town in Chiapas, where he would now be regarded merely as a harmless fanatic.

He entered the Dominican convent in Valladolid, where the Council of the Indies had its headquarters. Constantly informed of conditions in America, he was called into consultation by the government on all important matters relating to the Indians. The first American priest, who had been a lawyer, secular priest, friar, and bishop last of all became a minister of state.

It was during this period that he wrote and published most of his voluminous works, the most important of which was the



*Questio de Imperatoria Potestate*, proclaiming the natural liberty of man, the original right to take possession of created things, and the principle that there can be no government without the consent of the governed.

"If one reads the *Questio de Imperatoria Potestate*, along with the constitution of the United States," says Dutto, "he might be tempted to believe that the framers of the latter had taken the former for their model. The only substantial difference between the two documents consists in this, that Las Casas' pamphlet calls the supreme magistrate of a nation a king or emperor who rules (with the consent of the people) during his lifetime, whereas the constitution speaks of a president elected every four years. Las Casas does not grant kings as much power as the supreme law of the United States grants the chief executive."

After four centuries the principles laid down by Las Casas prevail, in theory at least, from one end of the hemisphere to the other.

Hearing that the *audiencia* of Guatemala had been removed to Mexico City, thus depriving the natives of the chance of justice, Las Casas went to Madrid to plead for the restoration of the court. The *audiencia* was reinstated. But it was Las Casas' last victory. He was taken ill in Madrid and died there July 31, 1566, in his ninetieth year.

When American history is rewritten in terms of its true beginnings, every American school child will come to know the name of Bartolomé de Las Casas.



### XXXIII: INDIAN AFFAIRS

OWING to its dense and backward Indian population, Las Casas is one of the chief centers of activity of the Mexican Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is spending a large part of its appropriation in Chiapas.

I was told by the *procurador* that this money is spent mainly for clothes, tools, food, salaries, fodder, laundry of the school children, gasoline for transportation, and schools. He admitted, however, that there were only four schools in the district, and that there were problems to be solved that were more important at the moment than education. Before schools could be effectively established, the Indians must be brought into villages as Father Las Casas planned. But as a people that lives from the soil must have arable land and an adequate water supply, the problem of centralizing Indian life is like that of making a rabbit stew when there aren't any rabbits.

So far the education of the Indians is in the propaganda stage. And it is not likely to progress rapidly beyond that stage until the Indians are safe from starvation and exploitation. To correct this situation is a Herculean task in itself, and in its

work the Bureau of Indian Affairs has the opposition, instead of the co-operation, of some of the other departments of the government. The chief aim of the government is to bring the Indians into the political economy of the nation, and as this problem is so complex it is not to be wondered at that there is a great deal of confusion and conflict in attempting its solution.

It would be difficult to aid the Indian even with adequate funds and organization, because the Indian, with reason, distrusts not only the motives of the *ladino*, but the value to himself of exchanging his own economy for that of the whites.

The policy of the creole and mestizo has been to abandon the Indian to his fate, or to exploit him in the most cruel manner. As one Mexican writer puts it: "The policy followed in regard to the Mexican Indians is more criminal than the destructive action employed against the North American Indians, because these were quickly assassinated, while the Mexican Indians are condemned to the refined tortures of a slow death."

This, in spite of the fact that Mexican economy has revolved, since colonial times, around its mineral and agricultural wealth, and the despised Indian population has worked in the mines and on the *haciendas*, often being compelled to labor twelve hours a day and to accept starvation wages. This vicious exploitation has made possible the enormous fortunes which constitute the power of the upper classes who, ironically enough, would let the goose starve that laid the golden eggs.

But now Mexico would become an industrial country, and finds that it needs its Indians, if they can be drawn from a medieval into a modern system of economy and turned from a vegetating element into producers and consumers of manufactured goods. At present the Indians not only supply all their own wants, but offer the surplus of their home industry—such as serapes, hats, baskets, and pottery—in the markets at giveaway prices which make machine competition impossible.

This is the explanation of the new solicitude of the government for the poor Indian.

The first step in creating a homogeneous Mexican nation is to replace the Babel of Indian dialects with a common language. This, as the Paracho experiment shows, is not so simple. In Chiapas, where only 10 per cent of the population uses Spanish and there are no centers of Indian population, the task is still more difficult.

The vocational schools so far established by the Bureau reach the merest fraction of the population. They are for boys between fourteen and twenty and girls between twelve and eighteen, and are intended to provide a four-year course for boys in scientific farming and manual training, and for girls in dressmaking, nursing, domestic science, and personal hygiene.

But every effort of the Bureau meets with checks, not only from the Indians themselves, but from those who in one way or another derive some advantage from keeping the Indians helpless and ignorant.

Each Indian municipality has its own Indian authorities who are elected annually by a plebiscite and serve without pay. In the municipality of Chamula, for example, there are: a *presidente municipal*; one *regidor primero* and one *regidor segundo* who act as first and second vice-presidents; one *sindico*, or municipal judge; one *alcalde* and several *mayores*, or policemen; and the governors for the different parishes. There are also a number of *escribanos*, or literate Indians, who write letters and serve as interpreters between the Indians and mestizos. But over all the native authorities is the secretary general, a mestizo appointed by the deputy for the district or the governor of the state. This man has a salary, the liquor concession, and the power of imposing and collecting fines and taxes. He is the number one enemy of the Bureau. By encouraging the Indians to get drunk, involving them in fights with each other, and then fining them from fifteen to twenty-five pesos which they must either pay or work off, he controls the most vicious circle of exploitation ever devised.

The Indians look to the Bureau as their only friend, and come

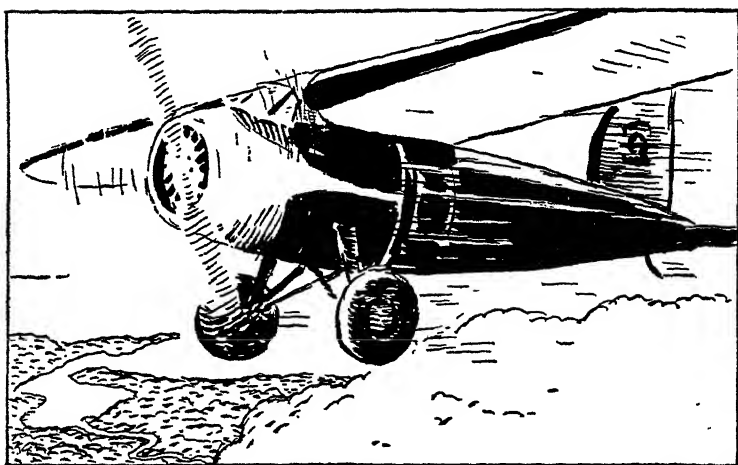
to it singly and in delegations from their villages to present complaints of ill-treatment by the general secretaries and by the plantation owners. Often they journey hundreds of miles to the office of the Bureau in Mexico City. If the case warrants, the Bureau takes it to court. But as the opposing interests are powerful and the probity of the judges vulnerable to pressure, nothing ever comes of it. The Indians, weary of waiting or compelled by need, return to their villages, and another barrier of disillusion and hate is raised against those who are sincerely trying to help them.

In all Mexico's wars and revolutions the Indians have easily been roused to take part, although they have never understood what they were fighting for, their misery making them hopeful that any change in the government would be better than their present suffering.

Yet these are the Indians who built Mitla, Monte Alban, and the great pyramids of Teotihuacán; who in colonial times constructed the beautiful convents, churches, and palaces, altering European architecture and stamping it with the forms of their own dead culture; who in the present times are the fountain of inspiration of the creative arts which give Mexico her high place in world culture and her national profile. No one who knows them doubts that they possess all the powers, intelligence and genius within the limits of human endowment. But if they are to be brought within the scheme of modern life it will be by making them proud, and not ashamed, of being Indians, and by treating them, not as serfs or beasts of burden or cogs of industry, but as human beings.

The Mexican government should realize that in Chiapas, more than in any other state of Mexico, the Indians have preserved the ancient beauty of their costumes and crafts, and that everything possible should be done to protect these Indians against the sudden impact of civilization which will come with the opening of the Inter-American Highway. Chiapas, with its wealth of natural beauty, its Mayan ruins at Palenque, and its colorful Indian

life, is destined to become Mexico's most popular tourist attraction just as soon as it is made easily accessible by automobile. Steps should be taken well in advance to keep the Indians from being demoralized and stripped of their costumes by tourists and unscrupulous dealers, and to insure them a fair profit from the tremendously increased market for the products of their looms which is certain to develop.



## XXXIV: UNDER AND OVER THE CLOUDS

THE morning the plane was due to take us back to Tuxtla a curtain of clouds unrolled over the mountain bowl in which Las Casas lies. Our bags were packed and waiting, but no plane came. At the company's office the agent told us that if it cleared for only an hour the plane could get through.

"But if it doesn't clear?" we asked.

"Why then it will come tomorrow—or the next day."

An enterprising taxi driver offered to take us to Tuxtla, but we were in no hurry to leave and waited.

I went to the post office to send a postcard which had a photograph of an Indian couple on the reverse side. The postmaster refused to accept it.

"It is humiliating to the Mexican people," he said.

Needless to say, the man was a *ladino*. He was ashamed of his Indian blood and at the same time had a strong inferiority complex because he was not white. He is typical. He explains why Mexicans, because of a false pride, hate both the Indians, from whom they spring, and the Americans, whom they emulate.

This inferiority complex is probably at the root of their sympathy for the Russians and Germans and of their dread of being dominated by the United States. Everywhere in Mexico, but especially in Chiapas, where the Germans are strong, I saw evidence of fifth-column activity—German propaganda leaflets, a German magazine, radio programs from a secret German broadcasting station in Mexico. At the hotel where we were staying the chief topic of conversation among the traveling salesmen was communism versus fascism.

We never tired of wandering around Las Casas. It is a city of crooked streets and romantic odd corners that spreads over a surprising area and is full of endless surprises—lovely old carved stone doorways, graceful balconies, and walls decorated with strange symbolic carvings about which there are fantastic legends. The houses are flush with the narrow stone flagged sidewalks and form a continuous wall one story high, one house being distinguished from its neighbor by its color—blue, buff, pink, or white. Through the *zaguáns* could be seen *patios* full of flowers, hanging baskets, native song birds in cages. The peaked roofs are covered with tile, blackened by the centuries, each roof tree surmounted by a stone cross as a protection against the lightning of God's wrath. From behind the walls came an incessant music—the twanging of guitar strings, the tapping of marimba keys, the whistling of birds. On the stones of the streets the hoofs of animals made a music of its own, full of varied rhythms, from the delicate shuffle of sheep, the light tapping of donkeys and mules, to the castanetlike clatter of spirited horses. Horses are still more important than horsepower in Las Casas.

Like all old Mexican towns, Las Casas is full of churches. Every street opens eventually upon a quiet little plaza shaded with trees where stands a charming church, convent, or chapel. The two hills that dominate the town are topped by churches—that of San Cristóbal, a crumbling ruin; that of Guadalupe, reached by a flight of sixty-one stone steps, shining white and



intact, but used, apparently, not for worship, but as a meeting place for the agrarian party, to judge by the political slogans on streamers we saw hung from the rafters.

But of all the churches in Las Casas, or even in Mexico, the loveliest, in my opinion, is that of Santo Domingo, with the delightful relief decoration of its façade, the tortuous gilt of its interior, and its dark old portraits of bishops and saints. It seems to have aged beautifully without suffering the scars of violence that have injured so many Mexican churches. We found women kneeling before the altar, candles burning before the statues of the saints. The Indians still come to Santo Domingo to wonder at its golden glory, as if it gave them a vision of the gates of heaven. It stands above a peaceful park where moldering stone benches invite repose in a perpetual twilight of leafy shade. The site of Santo Domingo was chosen by Father Las Casas, but he was away in Mexico City defending Indian rights when construction was begun, and the cornerstone was laid on January 9, 1547, by Bishop Marroquin, who came all the way from Guatemala to dedicate the new church.

With its fine old buildings, civil and religious, and the flow of medieval Indian life through its streets, Las Casas gives anyone who knows Guatemala the magic sensation of being in both colonial Antigua and Indian Chichicastenango at the same moment.

In the evening the "jackass express," as Vicho called it, a train of some forty mules laden with the red, white, and green canvas mail sacks, files wearily into town, bringing letters and week-old newspapers from the capital. The shops close, except for a drug store or two and some of the tailoring shops, from the doors of which men are constantly waving their charcoal irons to fan the coals. After dark the town shuts itself up and takes in everything but the sidewalks. In the main plaza with its walks shaded by *trueño* (thunder) trees there is a bandstand; but the band has been replaced by a loud speaker, and people no longer saunter in opposite files of men and women for one last social

meeting of the day, according to the immemorial custom of Spanish towns. A few go instead to the one movie theater, but the number of patrons hardly seemed sufficient to keep it open. All the Indians have returned to their lonely huts in the hills.

That night we went to a fiesta in a *barrio* or ward of the town, in honor of the patron saint of the church. The way was lighted by bonfires in the streets, as there are no street lights except near the plaza. In the square in front of the church, where people were gathered and little booths were set up for the sale of candy, hot food, and cold drinks and for games of chance (*polacas*), were roaring bonfires which provided warmth as well as dramatic illumination. Bands were playing and couples danced on the grass. The grand finale of the evening was a display of fireworks—rockets, firecrackers, and pin wheels and roman candles on grotesque papier mâché figures such as I had seen in the studio of Diego Rivera.

Two days passed in waiting without a break in the pall of clouds over the valley to let the plane come through, and when the third day dawned sunlessly we gave in to the importunities of the taxi driver and left by car.

The mountain road, bad enough at best, was deep in mud, and we waltzed in ooze, the driver's wheel spinning crazily and the car listing sickeningly as we wallowed in mud troughs like a light boat in a heavy sea, averaging scarcely ten miles an hour. But even at this rate we soon overtook the "jackass express" which had left Las Casas two hours ahead of us.

We were now in the municipality of Zinacantán which, like that of Chamula, spreads over several hundred square miles. We met many Zinacantecos, tall and stalwart, with their Oriental peaked hats dangling with red and green ribbons, short fringed *chamarras* or sleeveless tunics, and high-backed sandals. They were carrying columns of salt wrapped in matting to the Las Casas market and they moved with an easy grace on their long straight legs or, when they stood still, seemed strongly planted on the earth. They are the handsomest men in Mexico. The

women followed their flocks over the hills, and we would catch flashes of their blue skirts and red sashes through the woods, for the country is covered with pine, cedar, oak, red-barked madrone trees, and wild crab apples (*tejocotes*). Now and again we passed pack trains of horses and mules loaded with empty five-gallon Standard Oil tins, which the Indians make into watering cans, candle holders, spirit lamps, and a dozen other articles of use.

The town center of Zinacantán consisted of a church and a few adobe houses straggling along the road. On the porch of the *presidencia* a group of authorities were sitting on a bench weaving palm-leaf hats. With their black blankets wrapped around their bare legs, they looked like women tatting.

Once we came to a mineral spring and got out to drink the water which the Indians believe possesses medicinal properties. The water was naturally charged with air or gas and bubbled up all over the road. All this country is abundantly watered. We drove for miles along a rushing river which at Burrero is harnessed to generate power for distant Tuxtla. The banks are covered by a leafless orange-stemmed vine known as the love weed, because of a romantic belief that if you cut a piece of the stem, throw it over your shoulder and come back a week later to find it growing or dead it will tell whether your love is returned or hopeless.

Early in the afternoon we came down to Ixtapa, where the salt mines are located. The town was full of salt merchants from Zinacantán. They were the last costumed Indians we saw. After Ixtapa the color faded again from Mexican life. It was the end of the rainbow.

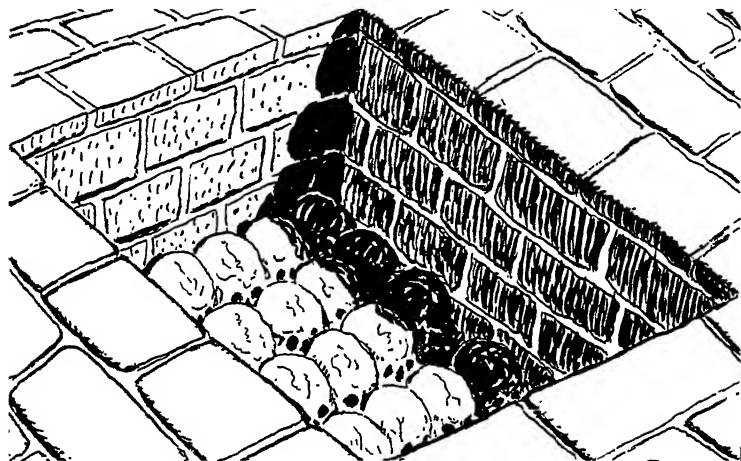
After five and a half hours we were again in Tuxtla, but only for the night, as the plane for Oaxaca left the next morning.

When we weighed in at the airdrome we were surprised to find that in spite of the strenuous life we had been leading largely on a diet of black beans and *tortillas*, we had both gained weight, proving how nourishing is the simple diet of the Indians. I had

annexed over twenty pounds and was obliged to pay six pesos overweight. The only other occupant of the plane was a young woman with a baby.

As we left the cloud-shadowed flying field the world tipped up around us as though we were falling, but soon we were soaring above soaring birds; then we rose through the vaporous ceiling into the frighteningly barren world above, where there was only sunshine and a limitless vista of white clouds like an expanse of polar ice.

Flying at an altitude of eleven thousand feet, we seemed to hang suspended in the void of the sky except for our racing shadow. But at last the clouds thinned, broke up, and permitted dizzying views of the world of green mountains and silvery streams far below. Off in the west we saw the great lagoons where Scandinavian Johnson was starting his fishing industry. Now we were skimming swiftly over the mountains through which we had toiled on horse and on foot for three weeks. Yalalag remained hidden, but I picked out a clearing through which we had ridden on the down trail. I could even see the ditch we had jumped. It appeared from the air to be a mere scratch, but from the saddle it had looked like the Grand Canyon. We began to come down. Tlacolula lay below us in its brown valley dotted with little hills. Then Oaxaca. How pleasant and modern this outpost of civilization seemed!



## XXXV: HIDDEN CONVENT

YOU can buy immunity from the real life of Mexico by traveling first class, by car or by plane, but if you want to know the sort of Mexicans who so sadly people the canvases of Rivera and Orozco you must travel second class on a second-class train, like the lazy local that takes from eighteen to twenty hours for the run between Oaxaca and Mexico City.

When we boarded the coach we reeled from the multiple smells of unwashed bodies, sweaty clothes, unchanged babies, and baskets of food and produce. But as the day wore on and the people continued to indulge their unappeasable appetites at every station along the way and to throw the refuse—chicken bones, fish heads, fruit skins, and other slops—upon the floor, already filthy with spit, vomit, and the urine of little children, the stench was literally asphyxiating. When a sick baby messed over my shoes, I gave up and went out on the back platform, where Vicho had already retreated.

There at least we were able to enjoy the Grand Canyon-like beauty of the Tremellin Gorge, which makes all the inconveniences of this long journey worth while. He who has not

seen the painted and castellated cliffs with strange cactus forms crawling out of the red rocks, has missed one of the greatest scenic thrills Mexico has to offer.

With evening we watched the sun set in an orange sky behind the blue-white snowy peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl, while off to the west it cast a rosy glow upon the white triangle of Orizaba, which hung like a symbol above the blue mists that filled the valley.

Then night forced us back into the coach, now with all its frightful smells hermetically sealed in with the lowering of the windows against the wintry chill. It was more than we could stand, and we abandoned the train at Puebla.

There are many interesting things to see in Puebla—the cathedral with its altar pillars and immense baptismal font of solid onyx; the Chapel of the Rosary, said to be the most beautiful in Mexico; the tile and pottery making—but the most astonishing sight is the hidden convent of Santa Mónica.

This secret convent existed illegally for seventy-seven years, until 1934, right across the street from the police station. It was finally discovered to the authorities only through the malignant act of some unnamed informer, who advised them to investigate a certain private house in the block. But even when the police went there and tapped the walls and took up the rugs they could find nothing, and were on the point of considering the tip a hoax, when one man happened to move a tall flower vase and saw a bell button. He pushed it and in a moment a cupboard set into a niche swung open and there appeared the mother superior. The ancient Augustinian cloister where fifty aged brides of Christ had been slowly withering on their virgin stems, was rudely invaded by the minions of the law. The brides were dispersed, their property confiscated, and their refuge opened to a curious public as a religious museum. Confessions wrung from the distracted sisters led to the discovery of three secret nunneries of other orders, whose effects have been assembled in Santa Mónica.

The hidden door led directly into the severely furnished cell of the mother superior, with its bed of boards unsoftened by springs or mattress. Our guide showed us the whip of barbed wire with which she used to mortify her flesh during a penance. All of the cells are now used to display the various ceremonial vestments of the nuns—the veil taken on entering the convent; the crown and bouquet of artificial white flowers; the black gowns for penance and funerals; the beautifully embroidered and brocaded dalmaticas and chasubles in blue, yellow, gold, and silver, made by the sisters for sale to the priests or sent to them for repair; the exquisite lace and needlework of patient hands that had forgotten time; and the pathetic little dioramas of kitchens and bedrooms with the cradled infant Christ, upon which frustrated housewives and mothers had expended their blighted instincts.

As we passed from cell to cell, we wondered where the chapel was.

"This way," said our guide, leading us into the mother superior's bath.

Removing a wood bin, he disclosed a hole in the wall about two and a half feet square, through which we followed him on hands and knees. When we stood up we found ourselves in the long narrow chapel, standing between two life-size statues. One represented St. Augustine and the other Santa Mónica who, our guide said, was a married woman, so that the brides of this order were not obliged to be virgins before taking the veil. Lining the walls were the two-hundred-year-old pews, carved with the sacred heart, emblem of the order. The backs of the pews took the form of crosses, each of which was encircled with a crown of thorns (some still tinged with dried blood) and the ropes used for flagellation.

In a glass reliquary on the altar was the mummified heart of the bishop who founded the convent in 1694, and a copy of the original parchment will, made five years before his death, in which he offered this somewhat gruesome gift to the pale

sisters of Santa Mónica. In back of the altar was a portrait of the donor himself, holding his heart in his right hand and a message to the nuns in his left, while a cherub displays a copy of the will.

From the chapel we passed into the sacristy, where the nuns assembled secretly behind a screen above the choir loft of the church of Santa Mónica to hear mass. As they were cloister nuns, they were forbidden ever to show their faces in public, but the screen, which on the other side was painted to represent a tile mosaic, permitted them to attend this public service without themselves being perceived by anyone in the congregation.

A trap door in the floor of the sacristy let us down into a dungeonlike room where a candle burned before a statue of the Christ dramatically relieved against a curtain of black velvet. Here the devout nuns, during penance, put on black sackcloth and knelt before the shrine, praying or chanting hymns in the deep silence of the night.

Owing to the cleverness with which passages were concealed by paintings and statues and trap doors, many of the secrets of the convent were kept for two years after its discovery, and it is doubtful if everything is yet known. It was a year before the burial crypt was found beneath the floor of the lower choir room. The coffins were let into the wall and the openings sealed with plaster and marked with an inscription. When there was no longer room, the earliest tomb was opened and the remains removed to provide space for the latest burial. The bones of the nun whose final rest was thus disturbed were placed, with the exception of the skull, in a common vault. The last burial was in 1857. It is still not known what provision for the dead was made after that date, but on November 20, 1937, a cemented well, three feet deep and four and a half feet long, was uncovered and disclosed several rows of skulls.

The nuns of Santa Mónica professed the strictest rules and lived sparingly: without servants or boarders. But while they ate off homely wooden plates and bowls and used wooden spoons and forks, their refectory table was beautifully inlaid, and it



would seem that they enjoyed their frugal meatless meals to the music of a German clavichord. Although the individual nuns took the vow of poverty, the order itself was rich. The cost of a novitiate was five thousand dollars, Mexican, so that only girls of well-to-do families could afford to enter.

One of the most interesting rooms in the convent is the immense kitchen with its circular charcoal brazier and huge earthenware stew pots. All the smaller vessels were arranged upon the wall in the form of a big triangle in a manner peculiar to Puebla kitchens.

The walls of the main *patio* are faced with blue and yellow tiles and enclose a fragrant flower garden with a dancing fountain in the center. On one of the walls is a reproduction in high relief of the hill of Guadalupe with a little well of holy water, behind which is a painting of the vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe appearing before the Indian whom she instructed to fill his serape with the roses he would find blossoming on the barren rocks and take them to the bishop. According to legend, when the Indian spread the serape before the bishop it disclosed the miraculous painting of the Virgin which hangs above the altar of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, afterward erected in her honor.

An open second-floor balcony runs around the *patio*, and upon the walls are oil paintings showing the saints in the moment of martyrdom—John the Baptist being boiled in oil, Saint Bartholomew skinned alive, Saint Simon sawed in two; and all the others.

Off the balcony are more cells filled with the spoils of the four convents—old chests with ornate iron locks in which the nuns kept their personal belongings; the patron saints of the nuns in glass cases; solid brass candlesticks weighing ten pounds; two French Sevres vases valued at three thousand pesos; and sacred relics, among which were the bones of the saints, each bearing the name of the saint, and which were donated by the pope at the time the convent was founded.

In the estimation of our guide the high point of the exhibit was a room in which was a tableau of the Last Supper with life-size statues of the disciples grouped around the Christ in attitudes copied from the great painting by Leonardo da Vinci, and all brightly spotlighted. But this was not all. The walls were hung with five murals painted in oil on silk velvet by a full-blooded Indian of Cholula named Rafael Morante. Our guide found the technique and the luminous qualities of the paintings nothing short of miraculous. Tourists are ushered into this room as if it contained the holy of holies.

The convent of Santa Mónica was founded in 1606 as a refuge for the wives of Spanish soldiers who were away at war. But it is said the wives preferred the privacy of their own homes, so it became a reformatory for women until 1680, when Bishop Manuel de Santa Cruz turned it into a school for virgins who took the advocacy of Santa Mónica, mother of Saint Augustine. Permission to establish it as a convent was given by the pope in 1688.

We left this strange desolated other world of women without men through a gate in the *patio* disguised on the other side by a painting, and I could not help a feeling of indignation against the government that had heartlessly dispossessed these aged women who had been able to keep a secret for seventy-seven years, and who in a few years more would have died in peace. I needed, as a counterirritant, to read over Mme. Calderon de la Barca's vivid description of the taking of the veil, as she witnessed it in a Mexican convent one hundred years ago.

I followed my guide back into the sacristy [she writes], where the future nun was seated beside her godmother, and in the midst of friends and relations, about thirty in all.

She was arrayed in pale blue satin, with diamonds, pearls, and a crown of flowers. She was literally smothered in blonde and jewels; and her face was flushed as well it might be, for she had passed the day in taking leave of her friends at a fête they had given for her, and had then, according to custom, been paraded through the town in all her

finery. And now her last hour was at hand. When I came in she rose and embraced me with as much cordiality as if we had known each other for years. Beside her sat the *Madrina*, also in white satin and jewels; all the relations being likewise decked out in the finest array. The nun kept laughing every now and then in the most unnatural and hysterical manner, as I thought, apparently to impress us with the conviction of her perfect happiness; for it is a great point of honour amongst girls similarly situated to look as cheerful and gay as possible; the same feeling, though in a different degree, which induces the gallant highwayman to jest in the presence of the multitude when the hangman's cord is within an inch of his neck, the same which makes the gallant general whose life is forfeited, command his men to fire on him; the same which makes the Hindoo widow mount the funeral pile without a tear in her eye, or a sigh on her lips. If the robber were to be strangled in a corner of his dungeon; if the general were to be put to death privately in his own apartment; if the widow were to be burnt quietly on her own hearth; if the nun were to be secretly smuggled in at the convent gate like a bale of contraband goods—we might hear another tale. This girl was very young, but by no means pretty; on the contrary, rather *disgraciée par la nature*; and perhaps a knowledge of her own want of attraction may have caused the world to have few charms for her.

Musicians entered, carrying desks and music-books, and placed themselves in two rows, on either side of the enclosure where I was. The organ struck up its solemn psalmody, and was followed by the gay music of the band. Rockets were let off outside the church, and, at the same time, the *Madrina* and all the relations entered and knelt down in front of the grating which looks into the convent, but before which hung a dismal black curtain. I left my chair and knelt down beside the godmother.

Suddenly the curtain was withdrawn, and the picturesque beauty of the scene within baffles all description. Beside the altar, which was in a blaze of light, was a perfect mass of crimson and gold drapery; the walls, the antique chairs, the table before which the priests sat, all hung with the same splendid material. The bishop wore his superb mitre and robes of crimson and gold; the attendant priests also glittering in crimson and gold embroidery.

In contrast to these, five-and-twenty figures, entirely robed in black from head to foot, were ranged on each side of the room prostrate, their faces touching the ground, and in their hands immense lighted tapers. On the foreground was spread a purple carpet bordered round with a garland of freshly-gathered flowers, roses, carnations and heliotrope, the only thing that looked real and living in the whole scene; and in the middle of this knelt the novice, still arrayed in her blue satin, white lace veil and jewels, and also with a great lighted taper in her hand.

The black nuns then rose and sang a hymn, every now and then falling on their faces and touching the floor with their foreheads. The whole looked like an incantation, or a scene in *Robert le Diable*. The novice was then raised from the ground and led to the feet of the bishop, who examined her as to her vocation, and gave her his blessing, and once more the black curtain fell between us and them.

In the *second act*, she was lying prostrate on the floor, disrobed of her profane dress, and covered over with a black cloth, while the black figures round her chanted a hymn. She was now dead to the world. The sunbeams faded away, as if they would not look upon the scene, and all the light was concentrated in one great mass upon the convent group.

Again she was raised. All the blood had rushed into her face and her attempt at a smile was truly painful. She then knelt before the bishop and received the benediction, with the sign of the cross, from a white hand with the pastoral ring. She then went round alone to embrace all the dark phantoms as they stood motionless, and as each dark shadow clasped her in its arms, it seemed like the dead welcoming a new arrival to the shades.

But I forget the sermon, which was delivered by a fat priest, who elbowed his way with some difficulty through the crowd to the grating, panting and in a prodigious heat, and ensconced himself in a great arm-chair close beside us. He assured her that she "had chosen the good part, which could not be taken away from her"; that she was now one of the elect, "chosen from amongst the wickedness and dangers of the world" (picked out like a plum from the pie). He mentioned with pity and contempt those who were "yet struggling in the great Babylon"; and compared their miserable fate with hers, the Bride of Christ, who, after suffering a few privations here during a short term of years, should be received at once into a kingdom of glory. The whole

discourse was well calculated to rally her fainting spirits, if fainting they were, and to inspire us with a great disgust for ourselves.

When the sermon was concluded, the music again struck up—the heroine of the day came forward, and stood before the grating to take her last look at this wicked world.



## XXXVI: XOCHIMILCO

**X** STANDS for the unknown in the pronunciation of Mexican Indian names. O-a-x-a-c-a is pronounced *Wah-ba-ca*; T-u-x-t-l-a, *Toos-tla*; U-x-m-a-l, *Oosh-mal*. So it is not surprising that X-o-x-o-c-o-t-l-á-n should be *Ho-ho-cote-lán* and X-o-c-h-i-m-i-l-c-o, *So-chee-meel-ko*. If there is any rule, I haven't been able to figure it out. But then, one of the chief charms of Mexico is the seeming lack of logic in everything.

Xochimilco is the place near the Mexican capital where are the famous *chinampas*, or so-called floating gardens. When I went there with Vicho and his father I expected to find a swarm of tourists, but as it was still out of the season and a Mexican holiday, the scene appeared purely native.

The day was all that could be desired, with a brilliant sun adding sparkle to the general gaiety. Along the landing were the flower-canopied punts, or *traiganeras*, whose owners vied noisily for our patronage, all beginning with rates upped to the American purse. Each punt had a legend painted on its gunwales. We took a fancy to the line: "By God, not even the eagles can

catch up with me." And that was the punt we bargained for and finally took.

We took our seats under a bower of roses, and the boatman shoved off into the placid canal, our marbling wake creating marvelous patterns of lines and colors. Upon the surface of the oily green water danced trillions of tiny bright green water plants which the boatman called *chichicastle*. Along the banks thick ranks of floating water hyacinths heaved gently in the swell of passing punts.

Xochimilco is a vast semitropic garden whose paths are waterways, miles in extent. It is possible to spend the whole day floating leisurely among the flower fields whose banks are lined with poplarlike trees, without once doubling on your course.

Thousands of Mexican people were out enjoying the holiday. The larger punts had tables for eight or ten persons, and they sat eating *tacos* and drinking *pulque* from huge earthenware steins. Everyone was in a boisterous mood and making merry with that whole-heartedness which makes the Latins such a lovable race. In many instances, punts filled with musicians were tied alongside, to furnish marimba and stringed music, to which the people sang and danced. A boy and girl did a rhumba, while other punts drew near to watch and applaud. Cruising orchestras drifted by. The air pulsed with laughter and music, and was redolent of perfumes, natural and artificial. Some young couples, accompanied by guitar music, sang "*Cbacha Domingo Voy*"—"Babe, I'll see you Sunday." Mexican music is either wildly gay, or despairingly sad.

Women in little narrow boats like kayaks bore down on us to sell ice-cold beer or flowers. We bought armfuls of roses, carnations, and violets, which the flower vendor tied up with carrot tops as our florists use fern.

"The carrots are for the table," she said, "and the flowers for the heart."

The combination was appropriate to Xochimilco, for it supplies the markets of the capital with vegetables as well as flowers.

In the fields cabbages grow among the roses, spinach with violets, onions between rows of phlox. Often the sweet odors of the flowers are drowned by the more poignant vegetable smells. The produce punts, loaded until there is hardly a half inch of freeboard, push their way between the pleasure craft.

But it is the flowers that catch the eye, if not always the olfactory sense. Xochil, in Aztec, means flower. Hence, Xochimilco signifies place of flowers.

A nomadic race, the Aztecs or Mexicans, came down from the north to the Central Plateau as early as 1245. At that time the valley in which Mexico City lies was covered by a great shallow lake dotted with islands, and it was on the islands that the Mexicans took refuge from the unfriendly peoples already settled in the region. They had set out on their wanderings in obedience to an oracle which said that wherever they should see an eagle with a snake in its beak seated upon a nopal cactus, there they should found their city. In 1325 they beheld this sign, and on the spot they built their first *teocalli* or temple pyramid.

This site, chosen in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy, could hardly have been more unfavorable for the purpose. There were no fish nor arable lands to support a large population. But the oracle must be obeyed, so the Mexicans set their wits to work and made their own land by weaving together the roots of aquatic plants and overspreading them with matted twigs and earth drawn up from the bottom of the lake. Thus were formed a multitude of floating gardens on which they grew their corn and chili, and later their flowers, for the Indians cannot live by bread alone. In time they planted trees on the *chinampas*, the deep-thrusting roots of which have anchored them so that they no longer float.

From this collection of aquatic gardens grew the magnificent city of Tenochtitlán and the great Mexican empire of Montezuma. When Cortes told Montezuma of the empire of Charles V, the Indian ruler said:



"Why do you tell me these lies? Know you not that there are only two empires in the world—that of Peru and mine?"

At the very moment he spoke those words, both New World empires were doomed. All that remains today of the glory of Tenochtitlán are these transient gardens which were its beginning.

I was dreaming of the past, when Vicho's father remarked:

"Well, we haven't seen a boatload of Americans yet."

"What?" said a mid-Western voice from a punt gliding by.

They were a party of Chicagoans. We were back in the present. It was time to go home.



## XXXVII: ADIOS, MEXICO!

**M**Y last days in Mexico were spent with Vicho's family at their home in Coyoacán, an ancient suburb of the capital. They were such dreamy pleasant days that I wished to prolong them forever.

Coyoacán is where Cortes lived during the reconstruction of Mexico City. His house still stands, as well as the palace where he tortured Guatémoc, the last pretender to the Aztec throne, in an effort to force him to disclose where he had sequestered Montezuma's treasure. But though Cortes burned the soles of the *cacique's* feet and finally hanged him, the secret never passed his lips.

Near Coyoacán is the great lava flow of La Pedregal from the extinct volcano of Ajusco. For many years it has furnished building stone for Mexico City. In the quarry of San Angel were found relics of a pre-Aztec civilization variously estimated to be from seven thousand to twelve thousand years old.

This quarry has been made a national monument, and is lighted with electricity, so that visitors are able to enter the excavation and see the skeletons and artifacts exactly where,

and as they were found. Some of the pottery figurines are of a high artistic order and give a staggering idea of the antiquity of American culture.

I went with Vicho to see Professor Luis Chávez Orozco, chief of the Mexican Bureau of Indian Affairs, and told him of the difficulties I had found besetting the Paracho experiment; of the hostile attitude of the water-starved Indians of the Oaxaca sierra; of the helplessness of the politically and economically exploited Chamula Indians of Chiapas; and of the opportunity I believed would exist, if grasped in time, of enabling them to work out their own regeneration through the protective organization of their home industries, which would be certain to feel the stimulus of tourist demand with the completion of the Inter-American Highway.

While we talked, delegations of Indians from various parts of the country were waiting in the anteroom to present their grievances. I noticed the dark circles of overwork under Professor Orozco's eyes. He sees everyone; listens daily to hundreds of heart-rending stories; does what he can to secure legal redress.

At times we were obliged to talk against the blare of a band playing in the courtyard of the building and the lusty singing of Indian children. The songs were intended to popularize the movement for helping the Indians and to educate the parents of the children. In this the Bureau has taken a leaf from Bartolomé de Las Casas, first protector of the Indians, who at the time of the Conquest pacified the warlike tribes of Tuzulutlán in Guatemala by means of Bible songs. Songs taught to school children and sung by them in their homes were a potent factor in putting over the agrarian movement. And now the Indian children of Mexico are singing for the final emancipation of their race.

"So much of our work is propaganda," said Professor Orozco, smiling a little sadly. "That is the aim of the regional conferences. We have to educate the people and create a united Indian

front, not only in Mexico, but in all the Americas. The Indian problem is the same everywhere and requires the co-operation of the Indian bureaus of every country that has an Indian population."

While we recounted our experiences I noticed that Professor Orozco was more and more impressed by Vicho's courage, his sympathy for the Indians, and his competency in dealing with them. At the end of our two-hour talk, he asked Vicho to accept a commission from the department to make a report on health conditions among the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas and to take medical supplies to the vanishing Lacandones. Vicho leaped at the proposal, and thus was realized his wish to return to Yalalag and Las Casas and to visit the land of the Lacandones.

But my own work was done. It was time to leave Mexico with its sparkling tropical sunshine, wine-heady mountain air and gleaming snow-capped volcanoes, and return to New York. . . . Dinner at Sanborn's with Vicho and his parents. . . . Train time all too soon. . . . Vicho and I clasped hands and bade each other: "*Nabeesdjajo!*"



## GLOSSARY OF SPANISH AND INDIAN WORDS

acaparador—middleman

agua miel—unfermented juice of the maguey

aguardiente—literally, "fire water"; strong liquor distilled from sugar-cane

aire—"nerves"; any real or fancied disorder that cannot be named

alcalde—sheriff

alferes—officers in charge of religious feasts

amate—the banyan tree

anisado—herb

asafetida—herb

ate—fruit paste

audiencia—court of justice

bajo—guitar with fourteen strings made in Chiapas

barranca—ravine

barrio—ward

bayaku—Zapotec for "get out"

Behique—Man of God (name given Bartolomé de las Casas by Indians of Cuba)

bonanza—rich gold strike

buen provecho—may it benefit you

cacahuates—peanuts

cacamixtle—coati mundi (see tejón and mapache)

cacique—native prince

cacle—sandal (Huasteca)

café—coffee

café extranjero—okra

caite—sandal (Maya)

calzone—white pajamalike trousers

## 258 MEXICAN FRIEZE

- cantera—pink or green stone quarried in Oaxaca
  - carrizo—wild cane
  - casa grande—ranch owner's home
  - ceiba—kopak-producing tree held sacred by the Indians
  - chamarra—sleeveless tunic
  - chan—Zapotec greeting
  - charro—Mexican cowboy
  - chichicastle—small green water plant
  - chinampas—so-called floating gardens of Xochimilco
  - chirimoya—custard apple (also called mamey)
  - colonia—settlement on ejidal land
  - colono—resident laborer
  - comandante—chief of police
  - comiteco—brandy of Chiapas
  - con permiso—with your permission
  - creole—American-born Spaniard
  - cresta—cock's comb
  - cuilapams—pecans (Oaxaca)
- 
- ejido—small farm grant to peons
  - escribano—public letter writer
  - excusado—water closet
- 
- faja—belt
  - filaria—blinding fly
  - fonda—eating house
  - fresco—soft drink
- 
- gallo—early morning serenade (slang)
  - granadito—fruit of the passion flower
- 
- habanero—brandy
  - hacienda—Mexican ranch
  - hasta luego—until we meet again
  - hombre—man
  - huarache—woven leather shoe
  - huerito—blond baby
  - huero—blond

- huipil—Indian woman's tunic blouse  
 huizache—shrub with flower used as scent for famous French perfume  
 ixtle—cactus  
 jacal—native cabin  
 jalatina—egg and brandy in gelatine  
 jarabe—Mexican dance  
 jicalpextle—large gourd basket  
 jícara—small gourd drinking vessel  
 jiltomate—small tomato with papery pod  
 jocote—plumlike fruit  
 junta—assembly  
 ladino—mixed blood  
 leche—milk  
 lechuguilla—type of cactus  
 machete—saberlike weapon and tool  
 madrina—godmother  
 maguey—century plant  
 mala mujer—poisonous nettle used medicinally  
 mamey—custard apple (same as chirimoya)  
 mañana—tomorrow  
 manga—rubber poncho  
 manzanilla—white sherry  
 mapache—*see* cacamixtle  
 mayordomía—saint's day fiesta (Oaxaca)  
 medio—small coin used only by the Indians, worth about six cents  
 mescal—liquor distilled from century plant  
 meson—inn with provision for stabling horses  
 mestizo—Spaniard with Indian blood  
 metracca—cage of lath with wooden clapper used during Holy Week  
     when bells are silent  
 milpa—corn patch  
 mirasol—cosmos  
 morelanos—honey cakes made in Morelia  
 mozo—manservant  
 mujer—woman



## 260 MEXICAN FRIEZE

naheesdjajo—Zapotec for "till we meet again"

nahual—soul's counterpart in animal world

nopal—type of cactus

oaxe—native legume

olan—skirt ruffle used by Tehuanas

pahua—a sort of avocado

pan de muertos—bread of the dead, eaten in celebration of the Day  
of the Dead

paraje—parish

patacón—Indian term for peso

patio—garden court of a home

pepino—miniature watermelon

perro—dog

peso—Mexican monetary unit

petop—worsted headdress worn by Huesteca women

peyote—cactus which yields an elixir used by witchmen to produce a  
trance

peyotero—"hunter" of the peyote, which the Huichol Indians believe  
is a bewitched deer

piroque—dugout canoe

polaca—game of chance

pos—corruption of pues, meaning "but"

posole—corn beverage, usually spiced

poyo—primitive stove of brick or adobe

precioso—delightful, charming

presidente municipal—mayor of a town

procurador—head of local Bureau of Indian Affairs

puesto—outdoor market stand

pulque—Mexican beer made from fermented juice of maguey

Purepecha—Tarascan language

putch—kerchief worn on back of head by Huasteca women

quartillo—Indian coin equal to three-fifths of a cent

quebrantahueso—king vulture

quexquemetl—triangular bertha worn by Huasteca women

quinto—Indian coin equal to one cent

ranchería—unincorporated village  
 real—disused Spanish coin equal to about two and two-fifths cents  
 reboso—scarf  
 repartimiento—a slave holding in colonial times  
 rodeta—black wool headdress worn by women of Yalalag  
 rollo—pleated bustle worn by Tarascan women  
 ronpope—egg and brandy drink  
 rosa de fandango—medicinal herb

¡Salud!—your health!  
 Sandunga—typical dance of Tehuantepec  
 sangrón—snob (slang)  
 serape—blanket  
 sindico—municipal judge  
 sombrero—hat  
 sombrero de plomo—heavy felt hat  
 sombrero de venticuatro—same as above  
 sopilote—black vulture  
 suyucal—palm-leaf rain cape (Chiapas)

taco—rolled tortilla enclosing meat with chili sauce  
 ✓tamale—chili, meat, and corn meal wrapped in corn husks and steamed  
 tasajo—dried jerked meat  
 teitipac—purple stone quarried in Oaxaca  
 tejocotes—wild crab apple  
 tejón—see cacamixtle  
 temascal—native steam bath  
 tentadura—crude assay made by panning  
 teocalli—temple pyramid  
 tianguis—native street fair  
 tienda—shop  
 tigre—jaguar  
 tlacopaque—medicinal herb  
 torito—papier mâché figure of a bull covered with fireworks used in fiestas  
 tortilla—thin corn cake  
 tostón—coin equal to about ten cents, used by Indians  
 totopo—tortilla with holes, made in Tehuantepec

262 MEXICAN FRIEZE

traiganera—pleasure punt used at Xochimilco

tripa de toro—bull tripe

trompas de hule—rubber-necks (slang)

tuna—form of cactus with edible fruit

urshkano—Zapotec for “thank you”

varcelona—earthenware vessel used for panning gold

Vicho—Zapotec for Clear-eyed (nickname given my companion by a  
beauty of Yalalag)

yagu—Zapotec for river

yes—Zapotec for cigarette

yeta—Zapotec for tortilla

yetsha—Zapotec for hot tortilla

zaguán—entry way

zócalo—main plaza of a town

# INDEX



## INDEX

- Alvarado, 222  
 Arriaga, 175, 176  
 Barca, Mme. Calderon de la, 245-247  
 Bazán, Martin, 64-68  
 Bureau of Indian Affairs, 229-231  
 Burgoa, Fray Francisco de, 72, 73  
 Burgos, Bishop of, 216, 218  
 Cajones, The, 109, 114  
 Calzontzín, 49  
 Cancuc, 195  
 Cárdenas, Lazaro, 13, 40, 47, 146, 196  
 Caso, Alfonso, 64  
*Cedar Deer, The*, 85  
 Cerro Colorado, 141  
 Chamula, town of 195, 199-202  
 Chamulas, character, 196; industries, 199, 200; marriage, 200, 201; religion, 201; government, 231  
 Chapala, Lake, 40  
 Charles V, 81, 217-224, 227  
 Cherán, 35  
 Chiapa de Corzo, 178-190  
 Chiapas, 154, 171, 175-238, 255  
 Chivo, The, 84-95  
 Cinjalapa, 177  
 Cobán, 222  
 Columbus, Christopher, 215  
 Constitution of the U.S., 228  
 Cora Indians, 56  
 Cortés, Hernando, 81, 189  
 Corzo, Don Angel Albino, 188  
 Corzo, Prof. Angel M., 188  
 Cosijoeza, 82  
 Cosijopii, 161  
 Council of the Indies, 216, 222, 227  
 Coyoacán, 253  
 Cross, symbol of, 67  
 Cuajimoloyas, 108-111, 114  
 Cubagua, pearl fisheries of, 215  
 Cuilapam, monastery of, 80-85  
 Cumaná, 219, 227  
 Dutto, Rev. L. A., 217, 228  
 Ejidos, 87  
 Esquipulas, shrine of, 67  
 Ferdinand, King of Spain, 216  
 Gage, Father Thomas, 187  
 Gattrell, Mrs. Wm. S., 84  
 Gay, Father, 66  
 Gold mining, 90-95

- Guadalajara, 40-45  
*Guatemala Profile*, 26  
 Guatémoc, 253  
 Guerrero, Vicente, 82  
 Guzman, Nuño de, 49  
  
 Henriquillo, 220, 221  
 Herb remedies (Oaxaca), 76, 77  
 Hidalgo, Guadalupe, 5, 48  
 Hispaniola (Haiti), 216, 221  
 Huastecas, 8; costume, 9, 10; industries, 16; marriage, 17  
 Huicholes, costume, legends, beliefs, 43, 44; marriage, 44, 45  
 Huistecos, 195  
  
 Inter-American Highway, 4, 15, 19, 98, 138, 139, 141, 187, 232  
 Iturbide, 48  
 Ixtaccíhuatl, 29, 59, 60  
 Ixtapa, 238  
  
 Janítzio, 26, 46-49  
 Jarácuaro, 48, 49  
 Johnson, Scandinavian, 176  
 Juanacatlán Falls, 41, 42  
  
 Kahlo, Frida, 25-27  
  
 Lacandones, 201, 255  
 Land of War (Tuzulutlán), 221, 222  
 La Pedregal, 253  
 Larrainzar, the historian, 202  
 Larrainzar, town of, 198, 203, 204; government, 204; market, 207; costume, 208; love of music, 209; fiestas, 210-212  
 Las Casas, Bartolomé de, first bishop of Chiapas, 186; stature as a world figure, 191, 192; opposed by slave owners, 196, 197, 223; first champion of human liberty in America, 214; biography, 214-228; song propaganda, 221, 254  
 Las Casas, town of, 190, 191, 193-198, 234-237  
 Los Mulatos, 112-114  
  
 Maldonado, Alonso, 224  
 Marroquin, Bishop, 221, 224  
 Mexican caste system, 21  
 Mexico population, 60  
 Michoacán, 3, 29, 31-52  
 Mitla, 62; ruins of, 70-73  
 Mixes costume and European characteristics, 125  
 Mixtecos, ancient culture, 62-68; sombrero making, 76  
 Monte Alban, from the air, 61; jewels, 62-64; ruins of, 64-68  
 Monterrey, 7  
 Monterubio, 84, 85, 86  
 Montezuma, 251, 253  
 Morante, Rafael, 245  
 Morelia, *morelanos*, 31; capital of Michoacán, 31  
 Morelos y Pavón, José María, 46, 47  
  
 Narizona, 75, 84, 85, 88-92  
 Natividad, 116, 118, 124, 126, 127, 131, 133  
 Nejapa, 141, 143

- New Laws, 224  
 Nuevo Laredo, 5  
  
 Oaxaca, 3; flight to, 55, 61; city  
     of, 62; market, 74; churches,  
     78, 79  
 Ocotlán, 86, 87  
 Olivera, Nicolas, 141-144  
 Orizaba, Mount, 60  
 Orozco, José Clemente, 41  
 Orozco, Luis Chávez, 29, 30,  
     202, 254, 255  
 Otomies, 13, 19, 20, 22, 29 30  
  
 Pacheco, Gaspar, 117  
 Paracho, 26, 34-39  
 Pátzcuaro, Lake of, 26, 46-49  
 Pátzcuaro, town of, 49, 50  
 Perella, Manuel Ignacio, 117-121,  
     127  
 Petra, 122, 126  
 Pizarro, 220  
 Popocatepetl, 29, 59, 60  
 Puebla, 241  
  
 Quiroga, Don Vasco de, 47, 51  
  
 Rabinal, 222  
 Rio Hondo, 148  
 Rivera, Diego, 24-27  
  
 Salina Cruz, 155, 156  
 San Blas, 165-170  
 Sandunga, 145, 168, 169  
 San Francisco Cajón, 114  
 San José, state of Oaxaca, 141  
 San Juan de la Jarcia, 145-147  
  
 San Juanico, 138  
 Santa Ana del Valle, 108  
 Santa Caterina, 135, 136  
 Santa María del Tule, 70  
 Santa Mónica, convent of, 241-  
     248  
 Santiago de Los Caballeros, 221,  
     222  
 Santo Domingo, church of, Oax-  
     aca, 78, 79  
 Santo Domingo, church of, Las  
     Casas, 236  
 Smith, F. Hopkinson, 51, 52  
 Soledad, church of, 79  
 Sumidero, Legend of, 178-185  
 Swadesh, Dr. Maurice, 36-39  
  
 Tancanhuitz, 8, 15-18  
 Tarascos, women's costume, 32,  
     33; education, 34-39  
 Tehuantepec, 26, 150-171  
 Temascal, 140  
 Tenampa café, 59  
 Tenochtitlán, 22, 251  
 Teotitlán del Valle, 75  
 Tequixistlán, 149  
 Texcoco, Lake, 22  
 Tlacolula, chapel of, 71; town of,  
     99-105; return to, 136, 137  
 Tlaquepaque, pottery of, 41  
 Totolapam, 138, 139  
 Tremellin Gorge, 240  
 Tumbes, 220  
 Tuxtla, lacquered gourds, 154;  
     trip to, 175-177; town of, 177,  
     178; departure from, 191; cap-  
     ital of Chiapas, 193; return to,  
     238



- Tuzulutlán, 222  
 Tzararacua Falls, 41  
 Tzintzuntzan, 26; the "Titian,"  
     51, 52  
 Tzotzil Indians, 212  
  
 Uruapán, 31, 32  
  
 Valles, 7, 8, 19  
 Vaquero bird, 141  
 Vargas, Samuel, 115, 116, 127,  
     128, 133  
 Velasquez, Governor Diego, Cuba,  
     215  
 Vera Paz, 222  
 Villa Alta, 114, 117  
 Villa, Pancho, 89  
 Virgin of Guadalupe, 244  
 Vocational School of Agriculture  
     for Indians, 34-39  
  
 White Horse, hill called, 71  
  
 Xilitla, 9; town of, 13; market,  
     13; monastery, 14; funeral, 15  
 Xipe Totec, 63  
 Xochimilco, 249-252  
  
 Xoxocotlán, old map, 68; town  
     of, 80  
  
 Yaganizia, 132 134  
 Yalalag, 26; ride to, 96-115; town  
     of, 115-117; government, 119;  
     marriage, 119-121; education,  
     122, 123; market, 124-126;  
     *jarabe* Yalalteca, 127, 128;  
     waking the dead, 129-131; de-  
     parture from, 132  
 Yaquis, 89  
  
 Zapotecas, ancient culture, 62;  
     human sacrifice, 66; village  
     feuds, 83; *nahuals*, 85, 86;  
     hand kissing, 86; language, 99,  
     118, 154; life with, 109-113,  
     135, 136; women's costumes  
     (Yalalag) 121, (Tehuantepec)  
     152, 153; dances, 127, 143,  
     169; religious ritual, 130, 160;  
     mixed bathing, 156, 157; men's  
     sombrosos, 160  
 Zinacantán, air view, 192, 193;  
     town of, 237  
 Zinacantecos, physical appearance,  
     194; costume, 194, 195





